2011

Judging the Rational and the Dead: Ann Radcliffe and Feminist Theology

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Richmond, VA
April, 2011

Acknowledgements

The number of people who helped with the formulation of this thesis are too numerous to name individually, but I would like to take a moment to formally thank some of them. First and foremost, thanks go to the committee, Dr. Rivka Swenson, Dr. Katherine Bassard and Dr. Catherine Ingrassia, who all eagerly agreed to work with me on this project. Each of them provided a great deal of insight into the project and gave generously of their time. I would like to thank Dr. Swenson in particular, who signed on to this project when it was little more than an idea and without whom this piece would not exist. Her assistance in the writing process was invaluable and her encouragement made so much of this work possible. I would also like to thank Haley Chilcote, who heard literally every word of this thesis and whose patience and tolerance through my odd work habits and hours made this thesis a reality. Special thanks also go to Sallie Hall of the VCU Writing Center, who worked with me every step of the way on this project and encouraged me not to be afraid to write what I truly believed. Dr. Randy Clipp of Monument Heights Baptist Church was an excellent resource on church history and ecclesiastical polity and gave generously of his time on multiple occasions to help me sift through doctrine. Thanks also go to the Ursuline Sisters of the Central Province for pointing me in the right direction concerning the history of their order, and to the staff of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond who provided valuable insight into the origins of Unitarianism. I would also like to thank my mother, Linda Beasley, and grandmother, Laura Wright, whose love and patience made my education possible. Lastly, I would like to thank the late Derwood Wright Jr., my best friend and the man who encouraged me to pursue every educational opportunity available to me. This thesis is dedicated to his memory.

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Abstract

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By Garland David Beasley, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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"Judging the Rational and the Dead: Ann Radcliffe and Feminist Theology" argues Radcliffe's first three novels, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), show a progression of feminist theology informed by the late eighteenth-century British religious movement of Rational Dissent. The thesis attempts to complicate and extend Radcliffe scholarship by moving away from fractured critical discourses and into more cohesive readings of Radcliffe that include feminist and theological interpretations of her work. Of particular interest to the project are Radcliffe's views on the circumscribed nature of women's existence within British notions of church and state. The thesis does more than attempt to note Radcliffe's objections to the circumscribed nature of women in British society; it also seeks to explore the potential solutions offered by a feminist theology that rejects establishment religious hierarchies in favor of a more Unitarian system.

Introduction

The early novels of Ann Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), have been largely overlooked Gothic texts. Of those commenting on Radcliffe, many critics and scholars have placed her and her texts within the conservative bounds of polite society. Although she has been regarded as an important eighteenth-century writer, her works have not been read as subversive feminist texts, but have been read as texts that affirm and maintain the status quo. This thesis will attempt to show that Radcliffe's texts are not examples of conservative bourgeois taste and values, but are subversive texts that continually question establishment patriarchal authority and advocate for legal, educational and theological reforms influenced and informed by feminist theology. This thesis will examine the following Radcliffean themes: the failure of religious and secular authorities to provide adequate protections for women, the need for female educational reform, and the reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural. These explorations will seek to reveal how Radcliffe's own feminist theology manifested itself in these works.

The first chapter of the thesis will argue that Radcliffe views religious and secular authority as failures in terms of providing adequate protections for women, and the role this failure plays in Radcliffe's feminist theology. Particular attention will be paid to the themes of female imprisonment and usurpation of female property and how Radcliffe utilizes these themes in order to advocate for legal and ecclesiastical reforms. The second chapter of the thesis argues that the role of education in the narratives is essential to the narratives and serves to advocate for female educational reforms. Additionally, it will review the educational debates amongst the dissenting communities in Britain during the

eighteenth-century and where we can place Radcliffe's educational standards. The final chapter will address Radcliffe's reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural in these novels and what this reappropriation means for Radcliffe studies and the female Gothic. This chapter will also include an assessment of what Radcliffe's reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural indicates about her own brand of feminist theology. The conclusion of the thesis will explore the unresolved issues in Radcliffe's fiction, including the marriage plot, the lack of real legal agency for her female characters and the advantages and disadvantages of the Gothic genre as a vehicle for advocating these kinds of reforms.

Throughout the thesis, biographical and historical research is integrated with close readings of the texts, in order to indicate the tenets and ideas of Radcliffe's feminist theology. Some scholars who have studied Radcliffe have chosen only to focus on feminist readings of her texts whereas others have spent a significant amount of time trying to place her theology. Anne Chandler has noted the prominence of Natural Theology in her work. Robert J. Mayhew has discussed aspects of latitudinarian Anglicanism in her work, while Rictor Norton has asserted that Radcliffe was a Unitarian. Although this thesis will not attempt to categorize Radcliffe's individual theological pantheon, it will attempt to assess the claims of these scholars to determine what theological doctrines assisted Radcliffe in the formulation of her own feminist theology.

This thesis will primarily use a feminist critical lens; however, it will also blend a feminist reading of these texts with a theological reading. The purpose of the thesis is not to separate Radcliffe the feminist from Radcliffe the Rational Dissenter, but rather to combine these two portraits and assess Radcliffe the feminist Rational Dissenter. The

ultimate goal of the thesis is to provide a reading of Radcliffe that is able to account for the ways that her feminist theology informs her Gothic narratives. It is my hope that such a reading of Radcliffe will move Radcliffe studies from fractured critical discourses into a more unified discussion.

Before beginning an in-depth exploration of her works, a brief biographical sketch of Radcliffe and a brief discussion of the religious environment of Britain in the late eighteenth-century may be helpful in contextualizing Radcliffe and the world that received her texts. Ann Ward Radcliffe was born July 9, 1764 in London. Her father was a merchant who ran a haberdashery at number 19 Holborn (Grant 9). She was raised in relative merchant-class comfort by her parents but was often "permitted to go on long visits to her father's and mother's more elegantly situated relatives" (Grant 15). One of these more elegantly situated relatives was Thomas Bentley, her maternal uncle, a prominent merchant and thinker in Liverpool who counted Josiah Wedgewood and Joseph Priestley, prominent religious and political liberals themselves, among his friends (Grant 19).

Radcliffe's visits to her uncle Bentley were frequent and often lengthy. The environment at Thomas Bentley's would have been markedly different from that of the London shop district. Bentley often had prominent scientists, physicians, dissenting theologians and other intellectuals visiting at the same time Radcliffe was staying with him (Norton 27). Rictor Norton writes of Bentley that he was, "a man of taste and intellect with rational Dissenting religious views" (Norton 26). The influence of her time with her uncle Thomas Bentley cannot be overestimated in the formation of Radcliffe's ideas, especially those expressed in these early novels. Biographical information

concerning how and what Radcliffe thought is sparse at best; due to this lack of hard biographical information, it is difficult to place her political or religious views. However, Anne Chandler has observed, "we can infer much about Radcliffe's politics from her familial contacts with Unitarianism and, more generally, with the energetic intellectualism of rational Dissent" (Chandler 134).

In the late eighteenth century Britain was engaged in a major internal religious debate and Thomas Bentley was at the very center of that movement. Although Radcliffe's parents "had evidently agreed upon bringing their child up wholly in the Established Church [the Church of England]" (Grant 17), this did not stop them from continuing to allow their daughter to frequently visit her uncle Bentley. A bit of a radical, Bentley was a man whose religious beliefs were often at cross purposes to those of the Established Church; his religious sentiments leaned more toward Dissenting Protestantism than those espoused by the Established Church. The most accurate description of Bentley's views would be Rational Dissent.[1]

Rational Dissent emerged in the late eighteenth century out of heterodox Christian beliefs. Martin Fitzpatrick notes that the "'Rational Dissent' of the second half of the eighteenth century constitutes a special phase in the history of heterodox Dissent" ("Heretical Religion…" 341). As a movement, it was an interesting cocktail of Old Dissent and heterodox traditions as well as the very latest scientific ideas, "[t]hese components of Rational Dissent, Dissenting Protestantism, heterodoxy, and enlightenment, were closely related" (*Ibid*). However, Rational Dissent did not simply

[1] Rational Dissent should not be thought of as a separate denomination within Christian thought. Instead, it was comprised of several groups. At its inception, the most notable denomination were the English Presbyterians, who subscribed to a rational model of the universe and God. However, by the end of the period comprising Rational Dissent, the Presbyterians had given way to the Unitarians, who subscribed to a rational model of the universe and God, but had major doctrinal differences with other Protestant sects.

confine itself to religious issues; a large part of what set it apart from other Dissenting movements was an "increasingly optimistic assessment of the possibility of truth emerging through open rational debate" (352). The idea of truth held by Rational Dissenters extended beyond religious truth and into other arenas, political reform and educational equality for women chief among them. Martin Fitzpatrick has noted that Rational Dissent was not dogmatic in any way, and that the ideas inherent in Rational Dissent were rather nonspecific:

> Rational Dissenters were unwilling to tie their politics down to a dogmatic programme. It is therefore easier to say what they were for and against in general rather than strictly programmatic terms. They were against corruption, for virtue, against oppression and for liberty, and, to be a little more specific, suspicious of government, antipathetic to establishments of religion, critical of aristocracy, hostile to standing armies, uneasy about imperial territories, opposed to slavery, condemnatory of extravagant public ceremonies, and in favour of more democracy and a citizen militia. In practice, they could be quite flexible in the interpretation of their principles. (353)

Given this brief definition of Rational Dissent, it is easy to see the ways in which this movement was able to inform many gothic texts, including Radcliffe's.

As earlier stated, Thomas Bentley was not at the fringe of this movement but in the very center of it. In addition to his business interests, he was a prolific pamphleteer, writing pamphlets on the direction of industry, political questions, arts, and in favor of the abolition of slavery—he also wrote a treatise on the education of women, which Wedgewood urged him to publish (Grant 18-19). Radcliffe's visits to her uncle were frequent until his death, when she was sixteen, in 1780. Aline Grant's research into Radcliffe's life has unearthed that she regularly took an active role in the conversations at her uncle's house, specifically those on literature. Grant notes that even by the age of fifteen or sixteen, she had read "widely and intelligently" and could discuss literature

admirably with her uncle Bentley and anyone else who might have been present (38).

One of the most radical elements of Rational Dissent that Radcliffe was exposed to was the Unitarian movement. Although it is unclear whether or not Thomas Bentley was a Unitarian, he certainly knew and worked with Unitarians such as Joseph Priestley and Josiah Wedgewood. Additionally, Radcliffe had a maternal granduncle, Dr. John Jebb, who was a leading Unitarian minister at the time. Jebb was a controversial writer and Unitarian Rector of Homestead (Norton 14). The Unitarians were a group that had its roots in Rational Dissent, but unlike other Rational Dissenters; they "denied the doctrine of original sin as the key to man's true nature and agreed that humanity and its environment were best understood by reason, experience and experimentation" (Watts 3). The Unitarians also insisted on a scholarly interpretation of the bible; this interpretation of the bible "led Unitarians to reject some long-held Christian beliefs, including the Trinity" (*Ibid*). Some of Thomas Bentley's closest friends were leaders in the Unitarian movement, Joseph Priestley chief among them. Priestley became an influential figure in the Unitarian movement and was one of the leading proponents of the Socinian sect of Unitarianism. Although some Unitarians did reject the divinity of Christ that is not to say that they did not believe in Jesus. Jesus continued to be a central figure in Unitarian thought; Priestley and other Unitarians viewed Jesus as the perfect rational template to base one's life on (*Ibid*). Men like Bentley and Priestley embodied exactly the kind of renaissance men and women that Unitarianism attracted. Unitarians founded schools and academies that taught "religion with philosophy and science in a supreme confidence that science was a way of understanding the rationality of God's creation" (Watts 4).

Of the little that is known of Radcliffe's childhood, it is clear that she spent time

with "more elegantly situated relatives" and Dr. John Jebb and his family certainly fit that description[2] (Norton 16). Jebb's wife, Ann, was an advocate for educational reforms who, publishing under the name "Priscilla," wrote a series of articles in the *London Chronicle* between 1772 and 1774 attacking "the universities' imposition of doctrinal subscriptions on undergraduates, a cause over which her husband, Dr John Jebb, resigned from Cambridge in 1775"[3] (Watts 85). Although contemporary biographers maintained that Radcliffe's sensibilities lay with the Established Church, Rictor Norton observes, "[t]here is no suggestion in Ann Radcliffe's novels or journals that she believed in the Trinity, or in many of the Thirty-Nine Articles [of the Established Church] or in the value of atonement" (Norton 18). Due to the fact that the majority of her journals have been lost, it is difficult to know exactly what Radcliffe's specific religious beliefs were. However, it is clear is that Radcliffe had access to a wide range of radical ideas concerning theology and educational reform, one of the most radical of which was Unitarianism.

The purpose of all of this background is to show the myriad connections Radcliffe had with dissenting religious movements of her day and to argue that these movements influenced and informed her thought as a woman and a woman writer. Furthermore, since Radcliffe is the originator of the female Gothic, these dissenting views that force us to reassess Radcliffe may also force us to reassess what the female Gothic means. This discussion is not meant to place Radcliffe within a specific dogmatic camp but is intended to show Radcliffe's exposure to radical theological concepts during the

[2] Rictor Norton notes that William Radcliffe claimed that Radcliffe spent the majority of her childhood with these "more elegantly situated relatives." He goes on to note that Jebb and his family "are among the most likely to have visited" (Norton 16).

[3] The specific doctrinal descriptions that Ann Jebb railed against were those that required students to affirm their belief in the Thirty Articles of Anglicanism.

eighteenth-century and to place her firmly into the camp of Rational Dissent. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how these beliefs manifest themselves in her work and to expand our thinking about Radcliffe to include the possibilities suggested by the dissenting ideas within *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, *A Sicilian Romance*, and *The Romance of the Forest.*

Chapter 1

The Castles of Church and State: The Political Theology of Ann Radcliffe

Ann Radcliffe's first three novels, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), all of which have received very little critical attention to date, present us with harsh indictments of church and state and the relationship between these two arbiters of eighteenth-century culture. Radcliffe's narratives portray both establishment church and state as entities that create imprisoning spaces for women—physically and otherwise. Additionally, these institutions serve to usurp female property and restrict the intellectual and spiritual development of rational men and women.[4] Throughout these novels, issues of female imprisonment and usurped female property rights are consistently revisited but these should not simply be read at face value. They represent larger critiques on the mutually reinforcing relationship between establishment church and state.

These critiques suggest that women are not safe within the concrete or non-concrete physical structures supported by the linked and oppressive strictures of church and state and that they must escape them in order to assert any agency whatever. Though it may seem that critiques of establishment church and state are unrelated, it is my contention that these critiques are a direct result of a feminist theology informed and influenced by the theological interpretations and values of Rational Dissent and Unitarianism. However, it should be noted that these early narratives of Radcliffe do not show a crystallized belief system, but rather the progression of feminist theology that becomes more vocal and more radical with each successive novel. *The Castles of Athlin*

[4] For a more in-depth discussion of marriage and the laws of coverture, see pp. 103-114 Huffton, Owlen. *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe.* Volume I, 1500-1800. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.

and Dunbayne presents the status quo for women in the eighteenth-century, *A Sicilian Romance* presents the limits of more progressive female spaces and *The Romance of the Forest* is the first of Radcliffe's narratives that is able to fully articulate her objections to establishment church and state and present solutions

Establishment church and state were issues of great concern to Rational Dissenters, especially those aspects of Rational Dissent that sought reforms for women. Mark Philp argues that though Rational Dissenters were temperamentally close to more moderate Anglican clergy, "they condemned all civil establishments of religion as corrupting the free formation of Christian belief" and "they attacked the alliance between church and state and the church's hierarchical structure and finance system" (Philp 36). Martin Fitzpatrick has also noted the "Rational Dissenters' negative attitude towards the Establishment in Church and State" ("Heretical Religion…" 360). Conversely, the idea that both Church and State were divinely appointed was, as Knud Haakonssen notes, "the dominant form of ecclesiastical politics in Britain" (5). Though the utter rejection of divinely appointed Church and State was not a belief shared by all Rational Dissenters, it is fair to say that this was the dominant view among many English Dissenters.[5] Radcliffe's texts reveal not only a suspicion of these two interlocking power structures, but an outright indictment of the unnatural nature of these systems.

Radcliffe's rather harsh critiques of church and state are germane to Gothic novels but also extend beyond the critiques offered by other Gothic novelists. Radcliffe's Gothic novels were not the first to note the shortcomings and failures of traditional legal and

[5] Haakonssen divides eighteenth-century English views concerning Church and State into four categories: those that believed both church and state were divinely appointed, those that believed church and state were simply human constructions, those that believed the church was divine and the state a human creation, and those that viewed the church as a human construction and the state as divinely appointed authority (Haakonssen 5-6).

religious power structures. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the Gothic ur-text, contains very similar themes. Walpole, in his introduction to the first edition, presents the novel as a "found" manuscript and separates himself from the "author's" themes of the novel thusly: "Whatever his [the author] views were, or whatever effects the execution of them might have, his work can only be laid before the public at present as a matter of entertainment" (Walpole 60). Walpole's attempts to separate himself from the "author" of his text are in some part due to his scathing indictments of these failures. Robert Miles has noted of the Gothic novel, "Gothic novels, notoriously, are not just loose and baggy, but split at the seams as they conspicuously fail to contain their contents" ("Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis" 42). Radcliffe's novels are no exception; they fail to contain their suspicions and concerns about traditional establishment legal and religious structures. In some ways, Radcliffe and Walpole are part of the same chorus; however, in Radcliffe's case, there are radical, political and religious agendas hidden just beneath the surface of her texts that are the direct result of her feminist theology. This chapter will argue that the shortcomings of church and state in Radcliffe's novels are directly related to her feminist theology. Additionally, this reading of these novels in their chronological order reveals an increasingly radical political and religious agenda hidden just beneath the surface.

Another important distinction between Radcliffe's Gothic and the "male Gothic"[6] of Walpole and others is her lack of realized supernatural occurrences. Though an entire chapter of this thesis will be devoted to this issue, some exploration of it here will be helpful. In Radcliffe's texts, unlike Walpole's, there is no ghost of Alfonso the Good, or

[6] Miles notes that "male Gothic," "has largely been defined in oedipal terms as the son's conflict with authority" (Miles 44)

anyone else for that matter, that will come to rescue her heroes and heroines and bring resolution and conclusion to the novel. Instead, Radcliffe's heroes and heroines must attempt to reason their way out of situations. True, there is a benevolent, yet passive, Providential force that seems to be guiding events toward their conclusion, but this force never actively intervenes in events. This lack of realized supernatural interference often serves to underscore the powerlessness of individuals in the face of legal and spiritual tyranny. Moreover, the lack of realized supernatural interference allows for plotlines that emphasize the lack of agency and power denied to women by these conventional power structures.

What emerges out of these novels are women who, in order to be able to assert any form of agency whatever, must attempt to carve out spaces that are devoid of these two authoritarian structures that deny physical, intellectual, and doctrinal freedom to women. They must find connections and/or physical spaces that will allow them the individual freedom of conscience they so earnestly desire. During the eighteenth-century, Rational Dissenters "retained an unshakeable commitment to the defence of the individual's exercise of his/her private judgment in matters of religious belief," but this belief did not stop with religion, for Rational Dissenters, it also held true for science, morality and *politics* (Philp 37). Radcliffe's narratives reflect a belief in the power of the individual conscience as well as a belief that both established church and state stand in the way of the freedom of rational men and women. Furthermore, these texts indicate that establishment legal and spiritual authorities actually serve to deny rationality and individuality to women and actively seek to control the female body and bind the female mind. Here again it is important to note that Radcliffe's political and religious ideology

does not present itself as fully formed and articulated at the beginning of her literary career but should be viewed as a progressive process that begins as a whisper and develops into a fully articulated voice.

In the Beginning…

Radcliffe's first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, is not the typical "female Gothic"[7] narrative that we would expect. Instead, it is a more phallo-centric narrative, one that emphasizes the circumscription of women. Female characters, whose property is usurped while they are imprisoned literally and figuratively by patriarchy, are pushed to the side in the narrative in favor of Osbert and Alleyn, the heroes, and Malcolm, the villain. Early in the novel, Radcliffe's narrator presents us with a stark contrast between the worlds of Athlin and Dunbayne as defined and driven by the personalities of the male characters. Osbert, the Earl of Athlin, and his family are virtuous, whereas Malcolm, the Baron of Dunbayne, is vice-ridden. We see Osbert as a man who embraces the natural world, often walking through the forest and fields of his lands. Fiona Price has written of Osbert: "he has an innate moral sense that is without the need for reflection" (83). We can contrast this with the description of Malcolm; we are told that he is "proud, oppressive, revengeful; and still residing of all the pomp of feudal greatness" (*AD* 3). Alison Milbank, in her explanatory notes comments, "Athlin represents the order of emerging statehood, but Malcolm the local despotism of the clan system" (114). We also learn of Malcolm that his mind is: "haughty and unaccustomed to controul" (3), whereas Osbert, "endeavored by application to his favorite studies, to stifle the emotional state which led him to arms" (5). The contrast between these two rulers could not be clearer; Osbert represents the emerging order of rationalism and statehood,

[7] Miles notes that "female Gothic" was a "genre written by women for women" (Miles 43).

which is represented as consonant with the "natural" world, whereas Malcolm represents the old "unnatural" order of emotionalism and feudal society. What is clear from the early stages of the novel is that Radcliffe is offering an utter rejection of "the pomp of feudal greatness" and an endorsement of the idea of emerging statehood. It is also suggested that, however, that even the more modern and "natural" order circumscribes women.

The old feudal order is unambiguously indicted as prejudicial to male interests. We learn that Malcolm was not always the Baron of Dunbayne, but rather ascended to that title after the death of his brother, who possessed Dunbayne as a result of primogeniture. Furthermore, we learn that Malcolm has forbidden his brother's wife and her daughter to leave the grounds of the castle. Malcolm's motive for imprisoning the Baroness and Laura is simple; it is a political power play designed to add to his estates. Upon the Baron's death, the hereditary family estates devolved to Malcolm but the Baron left his wife and their child considerable estates in Switzerland and elsewhere. Malcolm informs the Baroness, "The estates which you call yours, are mine; and think not that I shall neglect to prosecute my claim" (63). The Baroness, due to Malcolm's orders that she not leave, becomes, according to the narrator, "a stranger in a foreign land, deprived by him, of whom she had a right to demand protection, of all her possessions" (64). For the Baroness, the world of patriarchy becomes a literal and figurative prison space. It is not simply the fact that she is physically a prisoner, but the fact that she is a woman ensures that, even if she could escape Dunbayne, she would remain at the mercy of the patriarchal legal system. Theoretically, under the law, the property she brought into the marriage should have returned to her on the death of her husband (Huffton 59) but her

inability to reach the courts to claim it makes it impossible for her to repossess her lands. If she cannot escape to claim her land then the land will remain under the control of Malcolm. Of course, even if she could or did escape, the courts, both civil and ecclesiastical, were male spaces where women had little agency or ability to assert their rights, particularly since their rights were so few. The Baroness is then doubly imprisoned by both Malcolm and a patriarchal power structure that actively seeks to deny her agency.

The implications of patriarchal oppression of women manifest themselves in the actions of Osbert, Mary and the Countess herself. Evidence of patriarchy is not limited to Malcolm, even in the world of the "good" castle Athlin; Osbert ignores his mother's warnings against seeking vengeance for the death of his father. Even though she is the Countess, she has little real power because the land followed the hereditary male line and devolved to Osbert on the Earl's death due to primogeniture laws. Osbert's actions against Malcolm and subsequent capture serve to place both the Countess and her daughter, Mary, in harm's way. As Malcolm demands the hand of Mary in exchange for Osbert, there is a sexual component to Malcolm's demand for Mary as well as a political component. As earlier stated, Malcolm is not landed nobility in the same way Osbert is; however, if Malcolm can form a union with Mary and eliminate Osbert, then he will become landed nobility of a much higher stature.

In this way, Malcolm's demand for Mary becomes a political power play; Mary, though sexually attractive, is yet more attractive as a commodity and vehicle to gain wealth and power. Malcolm does not cherish Mary for her virtue or character; he views her as a means to an end. Eugenia DeLamotte, in *Perils of the Night*, has observed of

Radcliffe's heroines and their virtue, "the best of heroines ultimately has no physical power against a determined villain. But she [the heroine] does…have another kind of power" (32). That power is allegedly the heroine's virtue. However, in the world of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, neither Mary's physical or intellectual virtue is able to save her. Instead of being saved by virtue, she is thrown into an impossible choice between saving the life of her brother or marrying a man who is in all ways despicable to her. The only way to protect her virtue is to refuse Malcolm's advances, but to do that is to sign the death warrant of her brother. Encouraged by her mother, although with some misgivings, to marry Malcolm and save Osbert, she determines to sacrifice herself to protect the male patriarchal line through Osbert. Her dilemma illustrates the patriarchal space that the feudal order and the newer order represent, places where, as a woman, she has no place.

Mary's marriage dilemma does not end with the defeat of Malcolm and the rescue of Osbert, nor with her happy marriage to the peasant Alleyn, who is instrumental in the rescue of Osbert. Initially, her family forbids that union based on social class and what the narrator terms, "the darkness of prejudice and ancient pride" (109). JoEllen Delucia has observed of Mary's dilemma, "Mary finds herself caught between not just men but also rival historical forces, competing temporalities that coexist and offer women alternative futures" (DeLucia 102). Were Mary forced to marry Malcolm, she would be doomed to an existence of patriarchal domination, limited physically, socially and intellectually by the old feudal order. However, the opportunity to wed Alleyn presents what seems an alternative that will allow Mary to be married to one whom she loves and respects; Alleyn seeks to win her heart by affection and noble deeds. Mary's choice of

Alleyn indicates that she has chosen the new order of "rational" men, those who respect women and allow them agency and whose heart is virtuous and whose affection for her is based on who a woman is, rather than what she owns. Yet this happy ending is undercut by the fact that her "liberation" into the legal and ecclesiastical circumscription of women by marriage takes second-stage to a revelation about Alleyn; eventually, it is determined that Alleyn is the son of the late Baron and thus, the lands are his. The fact that he is nobility, although of a slightly lower status, is enough for both Osbert and the Countess to acquiesce to the marriage. Thus, it is not the "liberation" of Mary that allows the story to end happily but Alleyn's claim to the lands once held by the Baron that make the novel whole.

As for the revelation of Alleyn's noble heritage, Alison Milbank notes in her introduction to *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne,* that this issue "is not a complete failure of radical nerve on Radcliffe's part" (xvii). And yet it is a partial failure: it shows Radcliffe's reluctance to, or difficulty in, writing a truly radical ending. This is true even though Miles and Rictor Norton both place Radcliffe not only in the camp of Rational Dissent but also in the camp of the Radical Whigs. The Radical Whigs were outspoken opponents of nobility and fierce advocates for republican governments. Robert Miles writes of Radcliffe's works, "her novels are involved in political negotiations, a trafficking ultimately leading back to her Dissenting, Unitarian background" (Miles 44). Meanwhile, John Seed has written on the prevalence of Rational Dissenters in many radical political circles. Seed notes that whatever branch of eighteenth century political radicalism the historian chooses to pursue, "there are multiple connections to Rational

Dissent"[8] (Seed 140). We see this suspicion of the nobility played out not only in the narrator's indictment of prejudice against Alleyn based on social class, and yet in the end the class system is confirmed. And, of course, Mary has little individual freedom in either the feudal or the statehood spaces.[9] Radcliffe's novel only delivers its heroine into a legal and ecclesiastical position--marriage--in which women have no real individuality or freedom. This is done despite the setting of the novel's setting in Presbyterian Scotland, where religious freedom was endorsed.

Growing Pains

As Radcliffe's political and theological radicalism is somewhat muted in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne, A Sicilian Romance* is the first novel that emphasizes the plotlines and ideas that comprise the traditional Radcliffean model. Robert Miles writes of Radcliffe and the female Gothic, "critics have codified the female Gothic plot as an orphaned heroine in search of an absent mother, pursued by a feudal (patriarchal) father

[8] Seed notes the various political causes that Rational Dissenters were involved in, including: campaigns to repeal discriminatory laws against Dissenters and Catholics, opposition to the war with American colonists, radical pamphleteering, and the Radical Whigs to name just a few. For a fuller discussion of the political connections of Rational Dissent, see: Seed, John. "'A Set of Men Powerful Enough in Many Things': Rational Dissent and Political Opposition in England, 1770-1790." Ed. Knud Haakonssen. *Enlightenment and Religion*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996. Print.

[9] A somewhat troubling component of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* is its lack of indictment of religious authority. As the only novel of Radcliffe's that is set in the British Isles, this fact stands out and begs our consideration. While it may be tempting to read this lack of religious critique as a tacit endorsement of British (Anglican) systems and values, I would offer a very different reading. In the eighteenth-century, Scotland was a predominantly Presbyterian nation. Martin Fitzpatrick has noted the prevalence of Presbyterians and Presbyterian ideas in the early days of Rational Dissent (Fitzpatrick 342) and JoEllen Delucia has written on the intellectual debt owed by Radcliffe to the Scottish Enlightenment (DeLucia 102). Given these facts, we must reassess the lack of religious critique(s) offered by the novel. As earlier stated, Rational Dissenters, especially Unitarians, were suspicious of Establishment Religious authority (Anglicanism) but were for systems that lauded individual religious freedom. A large component of many Protestant movements, including Rational Dissent, was what Luther termed "the priesthood of all believers" (Luther 18); this meant that all believers were capable of appealing directly to God and Presbyterians were no exception. Additionally, the fact the Scots were allowed to "retain their distinctive religious organisation" (Colley 12) leads us the conclusion that Radcliffe is not endorsing an Anglican system, but rather a Presbyterian system that is, for the most part, void of the kinds of imprisoning spaces for women allowed by Anglicanism and Catholicism. However, what cannot be ignored is the lack of agency granted to Mary by a nation that stressed individual religious freedom.

or his substitute, with the whole affair monitored by an impeccable but ineffectual suitor" ("Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis" 43). Miles goes on to discuss that this is also "the ur-Radcliffe plot" (*Ibid*) and points to *A Sicilian Romance* as the first example of this female Gothic ur-plot. Although the above plot synopsis is a bit simplified, it is nonetheless a fairly accurate portrayal of *A Sicilian Romance*. Julia, the heroine of the novel, is very different from Mary of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*. Though Mary is a rational and somewhat educated woman, the world created for her does not allow her the freedom of movement and the full agency that the world of *A Sicilian Romance* offers Julia. When Julia is told that she cannot marry the man she loves, she (in contrast to Mary) simply flees. Julia then is written in the mold of the new Gothic heroine and the rational woman who refuses to be ruled by these imprisoning, establishment spaces.

Alison Milbank, in her introduction to *A Sicilian Romance*, illustrates the difference between this new type of heroine, who attempts to subvert the rules of patriarchy, and heroines such as Mary and the Countess in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*. Milbank writes, "Julia defies both the authority of her father and later that of the Church to assert her own freedom to marry as she chooses or to live alone" (Milbank x). This notion of Julia as a kind of New Woman is balanced by the marchioness, Maria de Vellorno, who does not use her mind or her rationality to get what she wants but rather uses her charms and her body to procure what her heart desires. A conflict arises when Julia and the marchioness fall in love with the same man, Hippolitus, the chevalier. The marchioness, in order to remove Julia from the equation, persuades the marquis to arrange a marriage between Julia and the Duke de Luovo, for whom, "the love of power was his ruling passion" (56-57). This casts the duke in the same mold as Malcolm from

The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne, a man who views Julia as a means to an end, not a rational individual with agency and freedom. Julia attempts to dissuade both her father and the duke from the match. Initially she succeeds with the duke, who responds to her plea, "I shall certainly be willing, *if the marquis will release me* from our mutual engagements, to resign you to a more favored lover" (60, emphasis mine). However, the marquis will not release the duke from their "mutual engagements," thus Julia, the rational new woman, is blocked and thwarted by a reactionary woman and by patriarchy's system of male arrangements.

Julia is then left with two choices, to marry a man she does not love or to flee. She chooses the latter and attempts to escape from the patriarchal structure of paternal tyranny. However, Julia's escape from her father and the duke only leads her to another patriarchal space: the church. Julia, with Madame de Menon, attempts to secret herself from the dangers of the duke and marquis in the convent of St. Augustin, "where she would find secure retreat, because, even if her place of refuge should be discovered, the superior authority of the church would protect her" (*SR* 109). Madame hopes that the Abate could be "solicited to protect her [Julia] from parental tyranny" (126). However, the Abate becomes a flimsy ally in their plan, declaring to Julia, "You have disobeyed the will of him [her father] whose prerogative yields only to ours [the church's]" (131); the Abate goes on to say, "I will soften the punishment you deserve and will only deliver you to your father" (132). Here again, patriarchy, in the form of the relationship between church and state, replicated socially and familialy, has conspired to trap and imprison Julia.

Julia's response to the Abate is most interesting, however: she replies to his threat

to return her to her father, "When I sheltered myself within these walls, it was to be presumed that they would protect me from injustice" (132). What is perhaps most interesting about her response is that it works and the Abate agrees to protect her. This response indicates that there is yet hope for women to assert agency. Furthermore, this reaction on the part of Julia differs substantially from the reaction we would expect from Mary or the Countess in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*. Julia asserts her own agency in the face of large, overarching patriarchal forces. Ultimately, the Abate agrees to let Julia stay at the abbey and offers to protect her.

However, the character of the Abate and the convent are not drawn in a positive light, a fact that ultimately suggests not just a critique of Catholicism but, interestingly, Anglicanism as well. The Abate is a man given over to his emotions and is often drunk with the power he wields over Julia and the marquis. His decision to grant her sanctuary is based on his own pride and vanity. The convent, though at first a welcome home to Julia, becomes for her a place of alternating terror and horror, where her future and well-being is threatened at almost every moment. It is tempting to read Radcliffe's portrayal of the convent as another manifestation of the anti-Catholic sentiment in Gothic fiction but I would argue that Radcliffe's anti-Catholic sentiment suggests an anti-Anglican agenda as well and many scholars have read it as just that. Robert J. Mayhew has written of English anti-Catholic sentiment that it "remained a mainstay across the denominations well into the Victorian era" (588). Mayhew goes on to argue that Radcliffe's anti-Catholic sentiment should be taken at face value due to what he categorizes as her latitudinarian Anglican beliefs. On the other hand, John Gascoigne has written on the connections between latitudinarian Anglicanism, Rational Dissent and political radicalism in the late

eighteenth-century, also noting that many of these same latitudinarian Anglicans ultimately joined Rational Dissent (Gascoigne 221). This fact gives us a way to read Radcliffe's critique of Catholicism as a dual critique, by extension, of Anglicanism. A.M.C. Waterman has written on the relationship between Anglicanism and Catholicism, and specifically, the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*: it "transmits a Catholic ecclesiology" and Waterman goes on write that Catholic ecclesiology is consistent with "a hierarchical ecclesiastical polity dependant on the principle of subordination" (209). Waterman argues that Catholic and Anglican ecclesiology and polity were exactly what the Rational Dissenters were dissenting from. Waterman's interpretation of the relationship between Anglicanism and Catholicism is not new. In a 1660 letter to the Countess of Peterborough, John Cosin, an Anglican, outlined the similarities:

> Finally, in the reception of all ecclesiastical constitutions and canons made for the ordering of our Church; or others which are not repugnant either to the Word of God, or the power of kings, or the laws established by right authority in any nation. (Cosin 210)

Confronted with the fact that both Anglicanism and Catholicism agreed upon upholding Establishment systems of order, we can read Radcliffe's anti-Catholicism to include an indictment of the similar Anglican system

In the case of *A Sicilian Romance*, it is precisely this adherence to Establishment systems of order and hierarchical and ecclesiastical polity that places Julia in danger at the convent. The Abate is willing to offer her sanctuary, but warns, "the marquis may apply to a power from whom I have no appeal, and I shall be compelled at last to resign you" (141). The indication in this passage is clear; if the marquis is able to reach Rome, then the Abate will have no choice but to comply. The idea that the marquis could affect a change within a religious structure speaks to the intertwined nature of the relationship

between church and state. Additionally, at this point in the novel, it is the hierarchical religious system that becomes Julia's enemy. The Abate can only offer her protection until his order is countermanded by a higher spiritual authority. If and when that order is countermanded, the only option she would be left with would be to "take the veil."

In assessing the option of "taking the veil," Cornelia, the dying nun, offers a cautionary foil that is more complex that it first seems. Cornelia's history is similar to Julia's. Both their fathers tried to force them into marriages to men they did not love; both fathers attempted to exercise parental tyranny to make them submit and both women fled to the convent of St. Augustin for refuge. Unlike Julia, Cornelia has already taken the veil, only to discover to her horror that her lover yet lives. For Cornelia, the damage is done; she has already taken the veil and there is no escape for her. Cornelia tells Julia she has "resigned myself a willing victim to monastic austerity" (*SR* 120). Again, the implication is clear, the monastery has robbed her of any agency she may have had. Fleeing from one patriarchal space (legal authority) to another (religious authority) has not solved her problem, but only exacerbated it. Robert Miles writes of the role of "taking the veil" in Radcliffe's fiction:

> The convent thus has a double valence in Radcliffe: as a place of refuge it sustains the heroine's genius (so long as the fate of her property still hangs in the balance); as a final destination (with property lost), it is the cemetery of the living, a patriarchal Bastille where females are shorn of their liberty […] ("Mother Radcliff" 51)

Although Miles places the role of the convent in economic terms, this double valence operates on multiple levels. The convent is a place which can and will rob Julia of any individual and intellectual freedom and condemn to her to a life devoid of agency. Ultimately, the convent does become the "final destination" for Cornelia and she dies

within its walls. Cornelia's tale becomes a cautionary one for Julia, warning her of the dangers of "taking the veil" but this critique extends beyond the concrete space of the religious cloister. "Taking the veil" in marriage to god *or* man leads only into another patriarchal space. In the end, neither legal nor religious authority is able to save Julia from the terrors of patriarchy.

The analogy between the two kinds of marriages--divine and secular--is emphasized elsewhere in this novel. It will be recalled that female imprisonment and usurped property rights were also issues in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*. Here, though, they are dealt with in much more depth. Unlike in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, these issues are not the bastion of the enemy but rather part and parcel of family life. Julia's mother, Louisa Bernini, has been the literal prisoner of the marquis for many years. Louisa's tale of "wretched bondage" is rife with warnings to women: "My meek submission was considered as a mark of a servile and insensible mind; and my tender assiduities, to which his [the marquis'] heart no longer responded, created only disgust, and exalted the proud spirit it was meant to conciliate" (176). Louisa, in endeavoring to keep the favor of her tyrannical husband, has performed all the duties expected of a woman by both legal and ecclesiastical standards, yet these efforts only served to hasten her misfortune. However, Julia has angered her father and incurred his wrath by not performing her tasks in "meek submission" with "tender assiduities." What can be inferred from these two contrasting tales is that women are not safe in establishment systems; there is not a simple standard that will grant them space in a patriarchal society. They are and will remain at the mercy and whim of patriarchy.

The story of Madame de Menon's usurped properties and rights is another striking

instance of establishment legal control of women, but one that seems to offer hope for women's capacity to exercise reason and help one another within establishment systems that actively seek to repress them and their rights. Madame de Menon reveals to Julia and Emilia the story of her marriage and subsequent loss of both husband and property: "The *Chevalier de Menon* died without a will, and his brothers refused to give up his estate, unless I could produce a witness of my marriage. I returned to Sicily, and to my inexpressible sorrow, found that your mother had died during my stay abroad" (*SR* 33-34, emphasis Radcliffe). The absence of other witnesses—her brother, who had also died, and the priest, who had been "threatened with punishments for some ecclesiastical offences" (34)—left her devoid of all witnesses to her marriage. As a result of her inability to produce a witness to her marriage, she was left destitute until the offer to educate the children of her friend Louisa Bernini. At the end of the novel, Madame "found in the restoration of her friend [Louisa] a living witness to her marriage, and thus recovered those estates which had been *unjustly* held from her" (198, emphasis mine). The restoration of Louisa then also becomes an outlet for Madame to regain that which was rightfully hers, suggesting some hope for women when male authorities, familial and religious, fail them.

What cannot be overlooked about the plights of Madame and Louisa is that they are connected. In both cases it is establishment patriarchal authority that deprives these women of freedom. Louisa is deprived of physical freedom and Madame is deprived of economic freedom. However, just as their plights are connected to one another, so are their freedoms. When Louisa is released from her prison, she is able to grant the freedom of her friend. Radcliffe, by connecting these two subplots, clearly shows that, whether

positively or negatively, what affects one woman affects all women. In the narrative, we also see patriarchy on the wrong side of reason, and we see women's strong efforts to subvert its strictures as well as escape its physical structures. The marquis, the duke and the Abate are all men whose pride and emotions often overpower their reason and color their actions in irrationality and hostility. Conversely, Julia, Emilia, Madame de Menon and Louisa Bernini are all women who are able to employ their reason to negotiate their ways out of patriarchal spaces. The last lines of the novel confirm a divine sanctioning of their efforts to subvert legal and religious authorities that oppress them, concluding:

> In reviewing this story, we perceive a singular and striking instance of moral retribution. We learn, also, that those who do only THAT WHICH IS RIGHT, endure nothing in misfortune but a trial of their virtue, and from trials well endured derive the surest claim to the protection of heaven. (199, emphasis Radcliffe)

A close reading of this passage reveals that not only is this victory over oppressive patriarchal forces coded as a private victory for the parties concerned, but is coded as a victory for virtue over vice, good over evil, and the transcendent divine over the forces of ecclesiastical and legal patriarchy.

Maturation

Though the themes of female imprisonment and usurped female property rights both figure into the plotlines of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* and *A Sicilian Romance*, these two themes are not brought to the forefront of Radcliffe's work until *The Romance of the Forest*. The heroine of the novel, Adeline, is faced with both of these patriarchal obstacles to overcome, again without the help of religious or secular authority. Adeline's first eighteen years have been marked by imprisonment, first in a convent of Ursuline nuns and then in a house in the French countryside. Adeline's own narrative of

her life tells us that her mother died when she was seven and, "At her death, my father gave up housekeeping, boarded me in a convent, and abandoned Paris" (*RF* 36). She goes on to say of her father, "But he was my father and the only person to whom I could look up for protection and love" (*Ibid*). For Adeline, patriarchal authority, in the form of her father, fails her early in life. As a result of this failure on the part of her father, Adeline tells us, "the bond of filial and parental duty no longer subsists between us--he has himself dissolved it, and I will yet struggle for liberty and life" (37). Adeline's dissolution of this relationship is indicative of a woman who is determined not to be bound by patriarchal strictures (figurative) nor its structures (concrete).

The language of Adeline's dissolution should not be ignored either. First of all, her language is Lockean: at once legalistic and revolutionary (Locke 330). Adeline treats the relationship of "filial and parental duty" as if it were a contract. Essentially, her argument is that since her father has failed to perform his duty, he has breached their agreement and thus she is under no obligation to perform hers. Additionally, the phrase, "I will yet struggle for liberty and life" conjures up revolutionary politics. *The Romance of the Forest* was published in 1791, at the height of Dissenting support for the French Revolution. The Revolution in France was cause for great debate in British society; Richard Price, a prominent Dissenting minister and Unitarian, in his "Discourse on the Love of Our Country" (1789) heartily endorsed the Revolution in France, an endorsement which led Edmund Burke to write *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790, which denounced Price and others for supporting the revolution. Adeline's decision to "struggle for liberty and life," in a novel primarily set in France, then becomes coded as an endorsement of opposition to an oppressive and patriarchal force.

Adeline also codes the convent as a space where she has no liberty. She observes of the Lady Abbess, "Her's [sic] were the arts of cunning practiced upon fear, not those of sophistication upon reason" (36). Adeline goes on to say that she was able to resist the Lady Abbess' intentions for her to take the veil. Owlen Huffton has written of French convent schools, "All taught the catechism, for the aim was to make good Catholics" (Huffton 218), but Adeline resists because the Lady Abbess does not or cannot use reason to persuade her. Adeline's rejection of "taking the veil" resonates with *A Sicilian Romance* and, like *A Sicilian Romance*, becomes more than just a mere refusal to become a nun, but becomes a case of rejection against an establishment religion that denies her individual liberty. Martin Fitzpatrick has noted, "Heterodox Dissent exemplified the Reformation emphasis on individual conscience and scriptural sufficiency"and he goes to write that this emphasis "challenged orthodox ecclesiastical and secular authority whether Protestant or Roman Catholic" ("Heretical Religion…" 339). Adeline's refusal to be ruled by ecclesiastical and secular authority is a strong indicator of Radcliffe's feminist theology bleeding through her texts. Moreover, we can again, as in *A Sicilian Romance*, see the connection between Catholic and Anglican ecclesiastical authority, and the rejection of that authority by Radcliffean heroines who seem more aligned with the promise and idea--theological and legal--of Rational Dissent.

Adeline's social position in the novel is a penniless orphan who has been cast out into the world by the last relation she has. George Haggerty has also observed this and commented, "Radcliffe offers us these qualities as Adeline's primary condition" (Haggerty 160). He goes on to note of the early condition of Adeline, "Radcliffe ensures that Adeline seems the destitute orphan that she in fact is" (*Ibid*). Although La Motte

agrees to take her in, he too is an outcast from society and is not able to offer her any legitimate protections, especially to the Marquis de Montalt, the villain of the novel. When the marquis and La Motte meet to discuss Adeline, the discussion "signals her marginal position in a world of male power and prerogative" (Haggerty 163). For La Motte, Adeline is simply a chip to be traded, or perhaps more appropriately, a "get-out-of-jail-free card" to be kept until needed or sold, to prevent the marquis from jailing him for his crimes. Adeline seemingly is not a person who possesses any intrinsic value on her own, but is a shadowy figure who can be treated as a commodity.

However, the relationship between La Motte and Adeline is a complicated one that involves a process of realization for Adeline. Initially, Adeline feels "the affection of a daughter" for La Motte (*RF* 44), but this feeling is replaced when she realizes that La Motte has "sold" her honor (body) to the Marquis "for a few years of existence" (209). At this point in the narrative, Adeline now thinks of La Motte as a "cruel enemy" (206). The Abbey, once a home and a source of refuge for Adeline, has now become a house of horrors where she is condemned to the whims of patriarchy. Anne Mellor writes of Radcliffe that she "believes that sublime horror originates not from nature but rather from man. She calculatedly moves the terror of the sublime from the outside into the home, the theoretical haven of virtue and safety for otherwise 'unprotected' women" (Mellor 93). La Motte then becomes for Adeline, another figure or patriarchal authority who has failed in his duties to protect her.

The ultimate figure of patriarchal domination and oppression in the novel is the Marquis de Montalt, and Adeline's rejection of him suggests her development from a "pitiful orphan" to a rational being who questions male authority whether it is religious,

legal (he is a Marquis) or domestic. The Abbey that Adeline and the La Motte family use as a place of refuge is part of his dominion. We also learn that once it was under the stewardship of the marquis, he turned it into a prison. It should be recalled here that the convent for Adeline was also an imprisoning space. Though at this abbey, the Catholics have been banished or left of their own accord, the kind of place that Adeline describes as a prison (the convent), has in fact, been turned into one. The marquis also attempts to imprison Adeline at his pleasure palace where he tries to persuade to become his "wife," only later do we learn that he is already married and she would be nothing more than a concubine. When he attempts to persuade her, she rejects him, stating: "You must deserve my esteem, my Lord" (*RF* 159). Adeline's rejection confirms her rationality and her refusal to automatically succumb to patriarchal strictures or their physical structures.

Also interesting is the fact that Adeline's rejection of the Marquis stops him in his tracks, suggesting hope for female agency even in a world which disallows it. Claudia Johnson notes that in the scenes between Adeline and the Marquis, "[l]ike the 'poor nuns' Adeline tells us about, he too becomes a 'votary' who has worshipped the wrong shrine and withheld himself from heterosexual virtue. But he is immasculated [sic] when he allows himself to be enslaved" (Johnson 84). The Marquis de Montalt, like Baron Malcolm, is coded as unacceptable as a lover or a source of power. In addition to these crimes, we later learn that the Marquis is a usurper who has robbed Adeline of her birthright, a birthright that stems from her mother. Donna Heiland notes of this, "[i]t should come as no surprise that the property originally belonged not to Adeline's father, but to her mother—who died shortly after her birth—and the marquis is yet another patriarchal authority whose power is built on the oppression of women" (Heiland 71). It

follows that it also should come as no surprise that it has been the marquis who has orchestrated every aspect of Adeline's imprisonment in an attempt to destroy the sole remaining heir to the property he has stolen from his brother, Adeline's father. The fact that Adeline is able to recover her property seems to indicate the potential for women to prevail legally.

In line with that optimism, part of what sets *The Romance of the Forest* apart from *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* and *A Sicilian Romance* is that it offers an alternative to despotic, tyrannical patriarchal religious and secular authority in the character of La Luc. Literally "the light," La Luc is a different type of man than La Motte or the marquis. La Luc is the template for the rational eighteenth century man.

> [La Luc] was minister of the village, and equally loved for the piety and benevolence of the Christian as respected by the dignity and elevation of the philosopher. His was the philosophy of nature, directed by common sense. He despised the jargon of modern schools and the brilliant absurdities of systems, which have dazzled without enlightening, and guided without convincing their disciples. (*RF* 245)

This description of La Luc codes him as a man with a firm commitment to the freedom of the individual conscience and an adherence to individual freedom.

Though Rictor Norton argues that La Luc is a manifestation of Thomas Bentley (Norton 84-85), this reading may perhaps go too far; it is, however, safe to say that La Luc represents an idyllic man of Rational Dissent. La Luc's power is not granted by nor based on the establishment, but on his ability to exercise his rational mind and individual will. Radcliffe describes Leloncourt as a place where "[t]he beauty of its situation conspired with these circumstances to make it seem almost a Paradise" (*RF* 277). Claudia Johnson notes of La Luc and Leloncourt that it is "a world set apart, beyond the reach of the Marquis, and inimical to the conditions which enfeeble men like La Motte and

empower those like the Marquis" (Johnson 85). The fact that La Luc's world is set apart from the world of the marquis and is described as "almost a Paradise" establishes it as outside the realm of the oppressive patriarchal structures. It appears as a fantasy space to some extent, but not an impossible space to achieve. Furthermore, La Luc's commitment to gender-equality and rebellion against "systems, which have dazzled without enlightening" (245) underscore the implications of Leloncourt, that it is a safe space for women in a physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual context. Additionally, the fact that this space is rare in the Radcliffean oeuvre is indicative of the scarcity of such safe harbors for rational women committed to political and ecclesiastical reform.

La Luc's Leloncourt, as the safe refuge for Adeline, becomes a place where she is free from the strictures of patriarchy. In the end, her lands are restored and she is able to wed Theodore--and we are able to forget, more easily than in Radcliffe's earlier novels, that it is still a male-ruled environment or that Adeline's property automatically becomes Theodore's upon their marriage. However, Leloncourt is not only a place where Adeline is able to be free of Establishment Church and State but rather is a place where all rational men and women can escape. In some ways, it is a sort of Eden where the dangers of postlapsarian patriarchy are unable to threaten Adeline and "all who came within the sphere of their influence" (*RF* 363). Rictor Norton has argued that all of Radcliffe's works "are really *Kunstlerroman,* whose central importance lay in the fact that their heroines are themselves literary creators, not passive women whose sole function is to be educated or abused by men, or whose sole duty is society" (Norton 85). The notion of authorship is important not only because of the poetry that Adeline creates but rather because of the fact that she has struggled to find a way to construct her own narrative. In

this way, the construction of narratives then becomes the goal for all Radcliffean heroines, Mary included. However, what the themes of female imprisonment and usurped property rights reveal is the difficulty, dangers, and near impossibility of attempting to construct an individual female narrative in a world where establishment legal and religious structures continue to hold all the cards.

Conclusions

What emerges from these novels is a steady progression of realized political and theological radicalism in the novels. However, this should not be read as indicative of an increasingly radical theological political agenda, but should be understood as the maturation of an author who becomes more skilled at embedding subversive ideas within her narratives. Though often overlooked, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne, A Sicilian Romance*, and *The Romance of the Forest* indicate movement towards a viewpoint that best fits into the category of Rational Dissent. However, tucking Radcliffe neatly into the camp of Rational Dissent, Unitarianism, or the Radical Whigs, as many scholars have been wont to do, does not do her or her novels justice, nor is it the purpose of this thesis. Radcliffe's novels, like many novels of the period, Gothic or otherwise, draw attention to the tyranny of patriarchy; however, what sets them apart is the potential solutions they offer. Radcliffe, in the novels, moves from a narrative, in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, that can only note the circumscribed nature of female existence to a narrative, in *The Romance of the Forest*, that can envision a world where all can exercise rationality and be judged according to their conduct, rather than gender. The fact that this idyllic world for women, Leloncourt, is part of a Protestant system, devoid of establishment religion and overarching legal restrictions on women cannot be overlooked; it is essential

to our understanding of who Radcliffe was as well as the source of her ideas on politics, religion and womanhood.

Chapter 2:

Gendered Voices of Education: Reason, Rationality and Female Educational Reform

Radcliffe's critiques on establishment church and state should not be taken as the ravings of a dissenter shouting into the wind, but rather as those of a woman with a solution to offer. For Radcliffe, a large part of this solution was female educational reform and equality. The eighteenth-century, in addition to being a time of great social and political upheaval, was a time of great educational debate and reform in England. Education, in fact, was one of the most hotly debated topics of the day. It is estimated that over 200 educational treatises were published in England between the appearance of Rousseau's *Émile* in 1762 and the turn of the nineteenth-century (Bygrave 21). These treatises ran the gamut between those, like Rousseau's, which sought Enlightenment ideals but continued to stratify educational opportunity by traditional gender roles to those, like Mary Wollstonecraft's, which sought to infuse Enlightenment ideals into the educational models for all[10].

Late eighteenth-century educational standards for women and young girls were dictated by men who were more concerned with the place of women in society and the preservation of societal norms than they were with the quality of education for women. James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) was a popular treatise on female education; in it, Fordyce stresses propriety, virtue and dignity and though he does include some poetry and mathematics, he recommends French, rather than Latin, for women due to the allegedly corrupting nature of Latin (*Ibid*). Despite Fordyce's pronouncements on

[10] In her chapter "Animadiversions on Some of the Writers who have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt" (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*), Wollstonecraft forthrightly attacks Rousseau and the section of *Émile* where de describes and holds up the inferior education of Sophie, an education solely designed for the purpose of making her the perfect future wife for Emile.

propriety and piety over rationality and educational equality, the nature of women's education had changed dramatically from the early eighteenth century, a time when, as Miriam Leranbaum notes, "a woman who could read, write, and spell at all was considered a prodigy" (282). Yet, despite this dramatic increase in female education, throughout most of British society education for women remained wholly incomplete in comparison to the educational opportunities afforded to men.

More important than Fordyce was Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762). *Émile* became one of the most widely read and distributed texts in England and prompted public and private debates on the nature of education--for men and women. Despite Rousseau's radical departure from prescribed educational norms and models, Geraint Parry observes of Rousseau, "his chief interest was in the education of males rather than females" and Rousseau viewed "women's natural mission is to please, support, and, ultimately, influence men--and specifically their future husbands" (Parry 261). Ruth Watts observes of Rousseau's gender difference in education, "[t]hey [women] were to be ruled by authority in all things, leaving matters of morality, understanding, religion, principles and abstract truths for men to judge" (26). Though Rousseau reflected some of the best thinking of his time, his views on women left them essentially no agency. However, as education was a "newly urgent issue" to the eighteenth century British mind (Bygrave 12) and though most of British society was content to keep education stratified by class and gender, there were those, such as, the Unitarians and the English Ladies, who sought to bring Enlightenment educational values to boys and girls, women and men.[11]

[11] Though the Unitarians did actively seek to provide more education for women in the eighteenth-century, Ruth Watts rightly observes that this education was designed to enable women to better fulfill their gender roles. Thus, though early educational opportunities were widely available to Unitarian women, this focus on female educational reform did not extend to educating women in colleges and universities (Watts 7-9).

Ruth Watts observes that many women were ready to assault Rousseau's "sexist fallacies:" Catherine Macaulay Graham posited, in her *Letters on Education* (1790), that women should be educated as men (Watts 26). Graham was not alone in the 1790's as Anna Letitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeweorth and Mary Wollstonecraft, among others, all focused on female education and agreed that women should receive a "rational" education (Watts 31). These women were quick to react to Rousseau's claims concerning the nature of female education. Susan Meld Shell notes that from *Émile*'s first appearance in 1762, "Rousseau's treatment of the ideal education of women has provoked charges that it is both unjust and inconsistent with his own underlying principles" (Shell 272). What makes this relevant to this thesis is that many of these women engaged in debate about female education were Rational Dissenters.[12]

One of the key components of Rational Dissent, especially the Unitarians, was the idea that women were equal to men and should be educated accordingly; Ruth Watts writes that "[t]his, in itself, was a significant change from the early eighteenth century when it was debated whether women were capable of any rational thought at all" (Watts 31). Radcliffe's uncle Bentley and his circle reflected the belief that girls should receive the same education as boys. Men like Bentley took great pains to educate their children, male and female, equally. For Rational Dissenters, a "properly enlightened community would be one in which *all* possessed full religious, civil, and political rights and which was capable of maintaining truth in all its forms" ("Heretical Religion…" 355, emphasis mine). A society such as the one envisioned by Rational Dissenters would, as a matter of

[12] It is interesting to note that the vast majority of the groups who sought educational equality for women were on the fringes of British society. The Unitarians, perhaps the fiercest advocates for female educational reform, were Rational Dissenters who were not included in the 1689 Act of Toleration, and the English Ladies were Catholic, which made them *persona non grata* in most of British society.

ideology, included increased education for men *and* women. Given the prominence of Rousseau and *Émile* in the discourse surrounding education and the number of Rational Dissenting women who wrote in reaction to Rousseau and Fordyce, we should read Radcliffe's ideas on female educational reform as joining, as opposed to starting, an already thriving educational debate.

Radcliffe's own education differed greatly from the orthodox female educational standards of the day. Although Rictor Norton argues that Radcliffe was not particularly well educated, the research of Judith Clarke Schaneman and Miriam Leranbaum indicates quite the opposite. Their research argues that Radcliffe's uncle Bentley played a large part in her education. However, Lerenbaum claims that when it came to views on female education, Radcliffe was a "Mistress of Orthodoxy" (Leranbaum 281) but this claim does not seem in line with our expectations of Radcliffe's views, given her background with Rational Dissent and her political ideology discussed in the previous chapter. Whatever the nature and quality of Radcliffe's own education, a closer reading of her narratives reveals a subversive, if not radical, agenda for female education. Although this agenda was radical at its time, Radcliffe was not proposing a reordering of society or its norms. In fact, her argument for educational reform falls very much in line with those of other Rational Dissenting women who claimed female education would strengthen, rather than weaken the social fabric.

Although seemingly peripheral to a discussion of educational reform, the issue of religious toleration should be assessed, if only in a brief manner. Radcliffe's arguments that female education would strengthen, rather than weaken, the societal fabric must be considered in the light of toleration. Many Anglicans and MP's feared tolerance as they

believed it would weaken the social order to such an extent that another civil war was possible. Mark Canuel writes concerning toleration and society, "Indeed, nothing less than the very survival of Britain's social body seemed to be at stake" (Canuel 12). Thus, for Radcliffe and other Rational Dissenters, it was just as essential to show that the tenets of Rational Dissent would not unravel British society as it was to show that female educational reform would actually strengthen it. This reading of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) will argue that her educational views were very much in line with those who were in favor of female educational reform. This chapter will attempt to explore and unpack the educational reforms called for by her early novels, and to try and trace those reforms to their theological roots.

What is Expected of Her

Perhaps the most striking, and certainly the most obvious, instance of Radcliffe's commitment to female educational reform is the prominence of education in her novels. Both *The Castles of Athlin* and *A Sicilian Romance* contain the educational backgrounds of their respective heroes and heroines on the very first page, "Matilda…had devoted herself to the education of her children (*AD* 3) and "The marquis…committed the education of his daughters to a lady, completely qualified for the undertaking (*SR* 3). Though education does not figure as prominently at the very beginning of *The Romance of the Forest*, it is that novel that contains the most stringent and subversive indications of Radcliffe's educational agenda. As earlier stated, establishment patriarchal religious and legal authority are held up as abject failures in the struggle for what Adeline terms, "liberty and life," and female education, or the striking lack thereof in many cases, fits

into this same category. In light of the increasing importance of female education to Radcliffean heroines, we can examine her oeuvre as one that becomes increasingly radical in its calls for female educational reform and equality.

In *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, we see the limits of orthodox female educational models. Mary, as discussed in the previous chapter, finds herself completely limited by the world of the novel, unable to flee yet uncertain of her fate if she stays. This can be directly linked to the *kind* of education she received. We can infer from the opening pages of the novel that Matilda gave Mary a typical education of the day for a woman of her status. Owlen Hufton, writing on a mother's role in the education of her daughter observes, "What a mother told her child, and especially her daughters, was part of a shaping process, acculturation, bestowing a view of the world" (Hufton 213). Huffton goes on to write, "the mother was without doubt in most cases the major influence in inculcating the notion of gender roles into her daughter. She knew what women should know and what women should do" (215). Mary's traditional education leads us to the conclusion that she has not received a scholastic/academic education but rather her education has consisted of being informed how and when to act in society in regards to her gender and societal role(s). Thus, Mary's education is a cultural education, and, as a result, we cannot and should not be surprised by her lack of agency. This lack of agency stands in contrast to women like Julia and Adeline in Radcliffe's later novels and education--at least to some extent--is part of what grants Julia and Adeline agency. The Lockean notions of struggling for "liberty and life" are nowhere to be found in *Athlin and Dunbayne* because these concepts are foreign to the women of the novel. Devoid of the educational opportunities afforded to Julia and Adeline, Mary's acculturation is what

engenders her powerless state.

Further underscoring the dangers of traditional female educational models is the danger that both Mary and Matilda are exposed to when Osbert is captured. Though Miriam Lerenbaum rightly observes, "We hear next to nothing about the education of most of Ann Radcliffe's heroines except, appropriately enough, that it is superintended by women" (293), it is the little information that we do get from Radcliffe about the educational background of her heroines that proves subversive. Mary's education is "superintended" by her mother and that is precisely what makes it suspect. This, however, should not be read as an indictment of female rationality and/or the rational faculties/capabilities of women, but rather on the system of traditional female education. Mary represents the limits of traditional female educational systems and the utter failure of these systems to provide a place in the world for women. While Osbert is imprisoned, Mary and Matilda can do little more than wait for Alleyn to attempt to free him. Were Alleyn to fail and Osbert to remain in Malcolm's hands, Mary and Matilda would be unable to defend themselves and their lands and would be forced to acquiesce to Malcolm's demands. Again, here we see a stark contrast in the way that Mary and Matilda are forced to negotiate patriarchal authority and the ways that Julia and Adeline are able to subvert that authority. Mary and Matilda are damned not only by their circumscribed place in society but also by their inability-an inability created by their lack of scholastic education--to exercise any agency on their own behalf.

Perhaps the most striking indictment of traditional female educational models is found in an examination of the Baroness and Laura. We learn of the Baroness that after her lands were taken, "The Baroness now passed her days in unvaried sorrow, except in

those intervals when she forced her mind from its melancholy subject, and devoted herself to the education of her daughter" (*AD* 64-65). It is through the Baroness and Laura that we really see the dangers of traditional female education. Though both the Baroness and Laura are "educated," their education does not extend as far as to offer a solution to their quandary. Instead, their education keeps them in a state of perpetual reliance upon men and patriarchy. We can also infer from this that the education of Mary via Matilda is similar to the education Laura via the Baroness. This lack of education and rationality forces them to accept the status quo offered by patriarchy and ensures their impotence in the face of patriarchal authority.

Furthermore, the education of the Baroness and Laura does not even hint at asserting agency in the face of patriarchal authority. When confronted with the idea of attempting an escape with Osbert,

> [The Baroness] lamented her inability to assist him, and informed him that herself and her daughter were alike prisoners with himself; that the walls of the castle were the limits of their liberty; and that they had suffered the pressure of tyranny for fifteen years. (*AD* 53-54)

The mere suggestion that "the walls of the castle were the limits of their liberty" flies directly in the face of the aforementioned Lockean assertions of Julia and Adeline and serves to underscore the limits--for women-- of traditional female educational systems. This traditional notion of "education" can be read as a warning to women of the dangers of the status quo. It also forces the reader to reassess what a "good" education is for women. Though far from a clarion call for female educational reform, we can read this as Radcliffe silently yet doggedly pursuing a feminist agenda that insists upon real education for women. Her next two novels attempt to show education as a sort of silver bullet that can aid women in freeing themselves from the intellectual shackles placed on

them by a patriarchal system-in the person of Baron Malcolm--intent on oppression and iron-fisted rule of their bodies and minds.

What She Could Be

Conversely, in *A Sicilian Romance*, Madame de Menon, "whose mind was superior to the effects of superstition" (10) educates both Julia and Emilia. Though here again the education of a Radcliffean heroine is, to use Lerenbaum's terminology, "superintended" by a woman," Madame de Menon does not share the same kind of education Matilda and the Baroness do. Madame de Menon's relation of her own history proves telling,

> Louisa and myself often shared the instruction of her father, and at those hours Orlando was often of the party. The tranquil retirement of the count's situation, the rational employment of his time between his own studies, the education of those whom he called his children, and the conversation of a few select friends… (*SR* 29)

The fact that Madame de Menon's education is superintended by a man, combined with Madame's constant charge to Julia and Emilia to, "exercise your *reason*" (36, emphasis mine) is an indication of a rational education. This is not to suggest that Radcliffe saw men as the only true source of reason, rationality and education but instead should be read as Radcliffe's acceptance of the reality of the era she lived and wrote in. As earlier noted, men were better educated than women in Radcliffe's time and had more access to educational materials and systems. This made men like Joseph Priestley, Richard Price and Thomas Bentley all the more important to Rational Dissent and the furtherance of female education because it was men like this--and Louisa's father--who could ultimately aid women in achieving educational reform and could educate them in the same ways that men were educated. Furthermore, Madame's experience with patriarchal usurpation of

her own lands and rights serves to make her aware of the plight of women in society. When we take these factors into consideration, we must reassess the role of Julia's education in her decision to flee. We must also reassess Radcliffe's commitment to education and remove the title "Mistress of Orthodoxy."

Though Madame makes every effort to ensure a rational, scholastic education for Julia and Emilia, we also see the limits of her own knowledge. For example, Madame is not skilled enough in Latin or Geography to teach them to Julia and Emilia, that task falls to a "dependant of the marquis's" (*SR* 5-6). However, the fact that Julia and Emilia are taught these subjects, Latin especially, proves interesting for two important reasons. First of all, Latin was one of the subjects specifically excluded from Fordyce's female educational model (Bygrave 21). This appears to be an intentional jab at Fordyce and his like-minded counterparts as this "dependant" of the marquis plays no other role in the novel and is never mentioned again. His only purpose in the narrative is to show that women are capable of learning these subjects. Secondly, in Catholic Sicily, Latin serves another purpose. Latin, in addition to, or perhaps because of, its status as the tongue of educated men was also the language of the Catholic Bible.[13] For Rational Dissenters, scriptural revelation was an essential tenet of their beliefs, thus, for Radcliffe, Julia and Emilia's ability to read the Bible for themselves would have been essential for their own spiritual development. Madame's efforts to give Julia and Emilia the best education she can allows them to be both rational and read scripture, thus allowing them access to the two conduits through which Rational Dissenters believed God's will was revealed.

[13] Though the Council of Trent (1532) made many changes to Catholic liturgy and practice, it did not order that the Bible be translated from Latin (translation of the Bible into German was one of Luther's chief heresies). It would not be until the Second Vatican Council in 1969 that the Bible or the Mass would be translated into languages spoken by parishioners.

Julia's education plays a role in her decision to flee and it is the superiority of Julia's education and sense of the world that ultimately leads her to her decision. Julia, when faced with the prospect of patriarchal parental tyranny, is urged by Ferdinand to make her own rational decision: "Do not suffer the prejudices of education to render you miserable. Believe me, that a choice which involves the happiness or misery of your whole life, ought to be decided only by yourself" (63-64). This is a clear indictment of the traditional female education; for Julia, the prejudices of education are those that see women as inferior and insist on the patriarchal model. Julia, when faced with the decision to succumb to parental tyranny or "assert the liberty of choice" (61), chooses the latter. Here again we must consider the role of Madame de Menon; Julia is forced into an almost identical situation as Mary in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* yet her decision is to flee; the only difference in these two women is the quality and kind of education they received. Mary's traditional female education/acculturation dooms her to submission whereas Julia's rational education directs that she should leave. Also, here we see exactly the kind of Lockean language devoid in *Athlin and Dunbayne*. What's more, we see Julia taking this Lockean language to heart and asserting agency in the face of tyrannical patriarchal authority.

However, what cannot be overlooked are the limits of education to act as silver-bullet for eighteenth-century women. Though we clearly see a contrast between the well-educated Louisa, "a lady yet more distinguished for her manners and the gentleness of her disposition, than for her beauty" (3), and the new marchioness, "Maria de Vellorno, a young lady eminently beautiful, but of a character very opposite to that of her predecessor" (*Ibid*), education is not sufficient to protect women from the structural

inequalities of patriarchy. Louisa and Madame de Menon--though both well educated--are, respectively, the unwilling victims of imprisonment and usurpation of property. Louisa's education is not enough to sustain her liberty, just as Madame's education is not enough to protect her under the law. Julia--also well-educated-- is not able to escape patriarchal spaces and forces either. It is only with the death of the marquis that these women can escape patriarchy and begin to use the tools they have acquired through their own educations.

The ending to the novel is here most helpful in determining the uses of education and the ways that education can be used to liberate women from the inequality of a patriarchal system,

> Madame de Menon, whose generous attachment to the marchioness had been fully proved, found in the restoration of her friend a living witness of her marriage, and thus recovered those estates which had been unjustly withheld from her. But the marchioness [Louisa] and her family, grateful to her friendship, and attached to her virtues, prevailed upon her so spend the remainder of her life at the palace of Mazzini.
> Emilia, wholly attached to her family, continued to reside with the marchioness, who saw her race renewed in the children of Hippolitus and Julia. Thus surrounded by her children and friends, and *engaged in forming the minds of the infant generation*, she seemed to forget that she had ever been otherwise than happy. (199, emphasis mine)

It is only in a community devoid of patriarchal standards and models, a community governed by women, that women can be free and education can serve to place women as intellectual equals. Additionally, the education received by the infant generation will be superintended by four women, all of whom have seen, and been subjected to, the dangers of patriarchy, and one man, Hippolitus, who encouraged Julia to "assert the liberty of choice" (61). For Radcliffe, intellectual equality is essential to the kind of society that she and other Rational Dissenters hoped to create; that same theme will be seen in *The*

Romance of the Forest.

What She Becomes

Although we learn very little about Adeline's education, other than the fact that she was educated in a convent, from the narrator of *The Romance of the Forest*, what we do learn proves telling. At the end of the narrative we learn that the nuns were Ursulines. A brief glimpse into the history of the Order of St. Ursula will shed some light on the educational nature of Radcliffe's narrative. The company of St. Ursula was founded in 1535 by Angela Merici and, from its inception, was committed to female education (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 491). Although originally formed in Italy, by the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, it had spread throughout Europe, most notably in France, which is also the setting of *The Romance of the Forest*. As a result of their commitment to female educational reform, they "placed themselves under the protection of St. Ursula, patroness of education" (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 491). Although there is a strong anti-Catholic sentiment throughout Gothic literature,[14] the Order of St. Ursula were champions of female educational reform. Due to the lack of references to any other monastic order within the narrative, we can infer that Adeline was, from the age of seven, raised and educated by Ursulines.

Originally, the Ursulines were not a cloistered religious community but simply a group of women committed to female education (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 491). It was not until 1612 that Ursulines became cloistered (Lux-Sterritt 4). Owlen Huffton writes of the Ursulines, that from their inception in the sixteenth-century, "they were to become over the next two hundred years the most considerable, and indeed prestigious,

[14] Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* are two examples of the anti-Catholic sentiment throughout Gothic literature as well as a great deal of eighteenth century literature

teaching order for women in the Roman Catholic Church" (Huffton 378). Adeline's denouncement of Catholicism, with its cloistered lifestyle and all its inherent dogma, is strong, but her comments about the convent are interesting. She says of the convent and the idea of taking the veil, "Too long had I been immured in the walls of a cloister, and too much had I seen of the sullen misery of its votaries, not to feel horror and disgust at the prospect of being added to their number" (*RF* 36). On the very next page, she explains to Madame La Motte:

> Excluded from the cheerful intercourse of society—from the pleasant view of nature—almost from the light of day—condemned to silence—rigid formality—abstinence and penance—condemned to forgo the delights of the world, which imagination painted in the gayest and most alluring colors, and whose hues were, perhaps, not the less captivating because they were only ideal:—such was the state, to which I was destined. (*RF* 37)

Adeline's discontent with the convent of Ursulines is limited to the cloistered lifestyle; never does she indicate that the education she received within those walls was subpar. Lawrence Lux-Sterritt writes of the Ursuline system of education:

> These two institutions [the French Ursulines and the English Institute[15]] are of such importance in the history of female religious congregations because, despite working from within the patriarchal confines imposed upon them and remaining within gender-allocated role distributions, they managed to lay the foundations of a new system of education for women: indeed their activities enlarged the pre-existing feminine roles within the [Catholic] Church. (Lux-Sterrit 27)

Thus, Adeline's education, even though it is "superintended by women," proves to be a better education than most of the women of the period would have received and allows Adeline to meet the challenges the novel will present to her.

Also speaking to the educational nature of *The Romance of the* Forest is Judith Clark

[15] Lux-Sterritt argues that the English Institute, founded by Mary Ward, and French Ursulines were closely connected and sought many of the same educational reforms during the Counter-Reformation.

Schaneman's research. Schaneman argues persuasively that Radcliffe's text is influenced by Madame De Genlis' *Adele et Theodore.*[16] Schaneman's work points to the similarity in the plot structures of the novels and the similarity of the names of the main characters, among other elements of both texts, and argues that *Adele et Theodore* was a source for *The Romance of the Forest*. Although Radcliffe was probably not able to read De Genlis' work in the original French, her husband was proficient in French and she may have called on him to translate passages for her (Schaneman 32). Additionally, the novel was translated into English in 1783 and published as *Adelaide and Theodore* (Schaneman 32). Schaneman writes that, in the novel, De Genlis':

> [P]resents her own program for raising children. However, as the prominence of Adele's name in the title suggests, for Genlis, the education of daughters extends beyond [Rousseau's] Sophie's limited formation to assume significance equal to that accorded to Theodore or sons. (Schaneman 32)

Schaneman goes on to discuss that De Genlis, "rejects Rousseau's beliefs about the usefulness of feminine wiles and insists that women who rely on ruse can control only weak, stupid husbands, but never worthy men" (34). Radcliffe's mention of Ursuline nuns and her use of Madame de Genlis' novel as a source for *The Romance of the Forest* both indicate the importance of female educational equality and underscore the disparity in contemporary educational models and systems.

Throughout the narrative, what cannot be denied is the fact that Adeline has a good education, especially for a woman in the eighteenth century. She is able to read foreign languages and knows enough of poetry to prefer the English to the French.

[16] For a more in-depth discussion of how De Genlis' educational concepts for women and young girls were put into action in England during the late eighteenth-century, see: Yim, Denise. "Madame de Genlis's Adèle et Théodore: Its Influence on an English Family's Education." *Australian Journal of French Studies.* 38.1 (2001): 141-157. Print.

Additionally, she is able to exercise reason throughout much of the narrative. We see Adeline's superior rational nature played out through the narrative. La Motte recognizes her superior mind when he allows her to investigate the presence of an intruder in the abbey, "It was necessary, however, that the person he [La Motte] sent should have courage enough to go through with the inquiry, and wit enough to conduct it with caution" (*RF* 62). La Motte immediately rules out Peter and Annette, the subalterns, on the basis of neither of them having enough wit; Madame La Motte is paralyzed by fear yet Adeline, in stark contrast to the others, volunteers to investigate. Though she is ultimately discovered, she never allows her fear to overcome her rationality. Moreover, when discovered, she endeavors to concoct a story that will save La Motte from the intruder. Furthermore, she thinks her actions through when confronted with the intruder. Radcliffe peppers this part of the narrative with references to Adeline's thought process: "She now thought," "upon farther consideration," "She was somewhat alarmed," "having surveyed the prospect around her," and "she perceived." Radcliffe's insistence that we know Adeline's mind throughout this entire process is essential to understanding her as a woman of thought and rationality, not a woman of irrational acts.

We can also use Madame La Motte to infer the rational nature and superiority of Adeline's education. In the late eighteenth century, the most cherished educational value would have been the ability to use reason and rational thought. Madame La Motte is capable of neither of these. Although she does her best to treat Adeline as a daughter, she is jealous of Adeline's beauty and, as a result, suspects Adeline of having, or desiring, an illicit relationship with Pierre La Motte, her husband. In many ways, Madame La Motte's character anticipates the problematic nature of a lack of rational female education

discussed in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft writes that one of the problems inherent with a lack of proper, rational education for women is that they will view their daughters as "rivals more cruel than any other, because they invite a comparison, and drive her [the mother] from the throne of beauty, who has never thought of a seat at the bench of reason" (Wollstonecraft 69). From what we are told of Madame La Motte in the narrative, it is clear she has "never thought of a seat at the bench of reason." We are also told that Madame La Motte's "strong passion" overrides her powers of reason. Additionally, when La Motte believes someone has discovered them at the abbey, Madame La Motte is unable to "command her terror" (*RF* 60). This inability to control her emotions stands in stark contrast to Adeline's ability to remain calm in situations which require reason. Madame is doomed to irrational thought processes based on her lack of proper education. Unlike Adeline, Madame La Motte remains a static character precisely because of her lack of an education based on rationality.

Clara La Luc also begs a comparison to Adeline. Although we are told that it was La Luc's "sole amusement to observe the gradual unfolding of [his children's] infant minds, and to bend them to virtue" (246), Clara is unable to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded her. Instead, Clara prefers to play the lute, forgetting her household duties and chores as well as her obligations to others in the village. Eventually, Clara realizes her error, saying "I have discovered I cannot rely on my own prudence" (253). Clara's actions also stand in stark contrast to Adeline's actions at Leloncourt. Radcliffe tells us that Adeline's "chief amusement was to wander among the sublime scenery of the adjacent country…often with no other companion than a book"

(260). We are also told of the "rational conversation" between La Luc and Adeline (260). When presented with almost identical options, Clara prefers her lute whereas Adeline prefers a book or rational conversation with La Luc. Although both Adeline and Clara are presented with educational opportunities at Leloncourt, it is only Adeline who is able to exercise rationality, control her emotions and seek further education.

However, there may be an additional explanation for the differences between Adeline and Clara. Chloe Chard has discussed the similarities between La Luc and Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar, and La Luc does bear some similarities to Rousseau's educational models. Though La Luc does educate Clara, Clara's education is not equivalent to Theodore's. We learn that Clara performs "little domestic duties" and that Clara joins Theodore and La Luc in the library for an hour a day (*RF* 249). Though Leloncourt is a safe haven for Adeline, La Luc is not educating his children in the same ways. Thus La Luc becomes-in the realm of education-indicative of the differences proscribed by Rousseau, Fordyce and others. Additionally, this asks us to reassess Clara's supposed lack of rational faculties and see them in a similar light to Madame La Motte's. Namely, it is not that Clara is not capable of rationality and exercising reason but that she has been limited by the educational opportunities afforded her. In this way then, Adeline is a sort of foil to Clara in that she represents-through her Ursuline education--two important things. The first of these is that women are capable of receiving the same kind(s) of education as men and secondly, that rational education for women will not upset the social order as Adeline proves a better companion for La Luc than his own daughter educated by his own hand.

At the end of the novel, when the conflict has been resolved, Adeline and

Theodore return to Leloncourt, a place where their happiness can be "diffused to all who came within the sphere of their influence" (363). However, here again as in *A Sicilian Romance,* Adeline must carve out a safe, non- patriarchal space in order to be an intellectual equal.[17] Leloncourt, La Luc's protestant pseudo-paradise, with its commitment to toleration and rationality is just such a place that allows her that kind of liberty and agency. Here again though, we see the limits of education to serve as a cure-all for eighteenth-century women. Without a safe place to exercise their reason, they are still consigned to a life where they will be treated as property and little more than second-class citizens.

Conclusions

Though it is apparent that Radcliffe was calling for female educational reforms, as far as female conduct was concerned, Miriam Lerenbaum is correct in referring to her as a "Mistress of Orthodoxy." Radcliffe's narratives view virtue, piety and modesty as essential values for women; she was not calling for women to burn their bodices but to be allowed to exercise their reason and rationality. For Radcliffe and many other Rational Dissenters, education for women was more than just an intellectual pursuit, rationality was the pathway to understanding the ways of god and, as such, needed to be exercised in order to attain communion with God.

Viewed in this light, teaching women to think rationally becomes more than just a discussion on education, but becomes a discussion about the nature of God and how best to understand that nature. Scientific, political and theological ideas of this period were measured against the yardstick of reason and logic and in order to be able to become

[17] For a further discussion of safe female spaces in Radcliffe's later fiction, see: Brenda Tooley's "Gothic Utopia: Heretical Sanctuary in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*" from *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century: Essays in English and French Utopian Writing*.

participants in the intellectual and spiritual processes of the eighteenth-century, reason was essential, without the use of reason, women would be not only consigned to a life of patriarchal domination, but would also sentence their daughters to such a life. The next chapter will deal more in depth with the rational nature of the eighteenth-century Christian Godhead.

Chapter 3

Terrifying Ghosts and Horrifying Reality: Radcliffe's Natural Theology and Reappropriation of the Gothic Supernatural

Earlier chapters of this thesis have noted the objections Radcliffe voices with establishment patriarchal orders of church and state as well as her harsh criticisms of gender bias in Enlightenment educational models, particularly those of Rousseau, in her first three novels, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). Throughout these earlier chapters, attention has been paid to the seemingly progressive, if not radical, tone of her novels. This reading may have given the impression that Radcliffe's oeuvre follows an increasingly progressive arc that corresponds to an increasingly radical personal ideology; this impression, however, is a false one. As this chapter will attempt to show, Radcliffe's reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural, a much maligned element of her fiction, is an indication of her theological views, the impact of those views on her fiction, and the presence of these theological ideas from the inception of her literary career.

As earlier noted, Robert Miles and Rictor Norton, among others, have carefully traced Radcliffe's familial connections to the emerging movements of Rational Dissent and Unitarianism and have argued for a reading of Radcliffe that incorporates these theological elements into her texts. Perhaps nowhere is the need for an understanding of Rational Dissent and Unitarianism more evident than in reading and assessing Radcliffe's reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural. Many critics have argued Radcliffe's "explained supernatural," that is her lack of realized supernatural occurrences, detracts from the overall experience of her novels. Robert Miles observes, "The usual complaint

is that the prosaic explanations for her terrific goings-on produce bathos, or, worse, cheat the reader through the creation of unfulfilled expectations" ("Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis" 49). Deborah D. Rogers has complained, "Why she should have hesitated to admit of actual spiritual agency it is difficult to discover" (Rogers 132). On the other hand, Yael Shapira has argued, "Ghosts, for example, were much more likely to achieve the desired effect if suggested, but never shown; hence the delicate, evasive presence of the supernatural in Radcliffe's fiction" (Shapira 3). These elements of her fiction actually begin to make sense when read against the backdrop of Rational Dissent. Of Rational Dissent, Martin Fitzpatrick has observed, "Enlightenment religion can be characterised as rational, tolerant and non-mysterious and the Enlightenment God as a beneficent Newtonian hero who had designed the world as a system of benevolence" ("The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence" 64). Fitzpatrick goes on to write of the, "general trend away from a mysterious interventionist God to one whose beneficent ways were regularised through the workings of a general providence" (*Ibid*). Thus, Radcliffe's reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural can be read as the natural conclusion for a Rational Dissenter.

In order to discuss a reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural, it may be helpful to examine an instance of the Gothic supernatural. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is the Gothic ur-text and contains many features which would later be employed by other Gothic novelists. Perhaps the most striking scene in the novel is when the ghost of Alfonso the Good intervenes at Otranto to bear judgment against Conrad, the original Gothic villain and the progeny of usurpers. Alfonso's ability to intervene clearly delineates those who are right from those who are wrong,

> The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins. Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso! Said the vision: and having pronounced these words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven, where the clouds parting asunder, the form of Saint Nicolas was seen; and receiving Alfonso's shade they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze of glory. (Walpole 162)

We can compare this with Radcliffe's endings, especially that of *A Sicilian Romance*,

> In reviewing this story, we perceive a singular and striking instance of moral retribution. We learn, also, that those who do only THAT WHICH IS RIGHT, endure nothing in misfortune but a trial of their virtue, and from trials well endured derive the surest claim to the protection of heaven. (*SR* 199, emphasis Radcliffe)

What cannot be denied in either of these endings, Walpole's or Radcliffe's, is that there is some sort of guiding force behind all these events maintaining order and dispensing justice. However, the way order is maintained and justice is dispensed could not be more different. Walpole employs exactly the kind of interventionist divine authority that many Rational Dissenters were moving away from. Radcliffe's use of a benign--yet passive--providential force can be read as indication of manifestation of a Rational Dissent theology.

In addition to her reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural, Radcliffe's texts also signal an awareness of Natural Theology. Anne Chandler writes of Radcliffe's natural theology,

> [W]e see her protagonists achieving a sense of spiritual consolation through a reverent appreciation to natural phenomena, but her statements of faith typically celebrate a temporary alignment of significant objects rather than a permanent highly variegated system. (Chandler 135)

Chandler expresses reticence, in trying, "further to specify the contours of Radcliffe's doctrinal allegiances" (134). Though I do agree that any attempt to specify Radcliffe's

exact theological doctrine is an exercise that is difficult at best, I do believe that we must attempt to situate Radcliffe's fiction in the context of these theological debates. In trying to situate Radcliffe's notions of Natural Theology, it is important to consider the limits that Radcliffe sees in the transcendent presence of the natural world; as will be shown, these limits are a direct result of the dangers found by her heroines in natural surroundings.

The final issue that must be noted before this reading can begin is Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror found in her essay, "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826). Though published posthumously as the introduction to *Gaston de Blondeville, or the Court of Henry III Keeping Festival in Ardenne. A Romance* (1826), it was written in 1802 (Waters 136). Mary Waters notes of Radcliffe's Gothic, "Radcliffe's most characteristic literary technique is to sustain suspense by avoiding the explicit grotesqueries of horror, instead exploiting obscurity and the unknown to produce more subtle sensations of terror" (*Ibid*). Radcliffe herself explained the distinction between horror and terror in the following way: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" ("On the Supernatural in Poetry" 143). Though Radcliffe's fiction is often much maligned for what critics have termed her "explained supernatural," there is a different way to read her lack of realized supernatural: namely, that the world of patriarchy presents so much horror that ghosts are not necessary to produce such sensations.

This chapter will attempt to explore the sort of theology indicated by her reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural. Attention will also be paid to Radcliffe's

tendencies towards Natural Theology, while, at the same time, noting the limits of Natural Theology in a patriarchal world. While no specific effort will be made to situate Radcliffe's own personal theology, particular attention will be paid to Rational Dissent, Unitarianism, and Natural Theology and how Radcliffe interrogates and engages these theological viewpoints in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, *A Sicilian Romance*, and *The Romance of the Forest*. In order to formulate this reading, the assessments of literary critics and historians will be considered as well as the pertinent ideas and writings of Radcliffe's period. Though these thinkers and their ideas will be considered, the novels themselves will remain foremost throughout this reading.

The Socinian and the Supernatural

Radcliffe's first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, contains very little reference to the supernatural, yet the references that it does exhibit are helpful in ascertaining the extent and kind of Radcliffe's theology at the publication of her first novel. In fact, the only reference to the supernatural comes more than two-thirds of the way through the novel. Osbert, though imprisoned, conspires with Edmund, a guard, to escape from Dunbayne. On the day of the escape attempt, after Osbert and Edmund have escaped through a secret panel in Osbert's cell, the guards return to find him gone; Radcliffe's narrator tells us,

> The grates were examined; they remained as usual; every corner was explored; but the false pannel [sic] remained unknown; and having finished their examination without discovering any visible means by which the Earl had quitted the prison, they were seized with terror, concluding it to be the work of a supernatural power, and immediately alarmed the castle. (*AD* 73)

Here we see the guards terrified that some sort of interventionist supernatural power has aided the Earl in his escape. As readers, we know that nothing of the sort has happened

thus the idea of a supernatural power intervening on the Earl's behalf is, at the least, preposterous to us. The guard's behavior is then coded as irrational and working against the very nature of the kind of Godhead embraced by Rational Dissenters and Unitarians. Further, as Alison Milbank observes, Baron Malcolm represents, "the local despotism of the clan system" (Milbank 114). Belief in some sort of supernatural intervention--devoid of rational investigation that moves beyond a cursory search of the area--places Malcolm and his ilk as working against the ideal of rationality, a concept essential and central to the Enlightenment mind.

Yet another important aspect of the irrational nature of the conclusion of supernatural intervention is that it may reveal an interesting theological strain in Radcliffe's work. This scene very closely mirrors the biblical account of the resurrection found in the Gospel of John.[18] This could be indicative of a Socinian[19] belief on the part of Radcliffe; Socinianism is a "rejection of belief in the divinity of Jesus (who was nevertheless seen as the most perfect human being)" (Watts x). Rictor Norton points out, "There is no suggestion in Radcliffe's novels or journals that she believed in the Trinity or in many of the Thirty-Nine Articles or in the value of atonement" (Norton 18). While neither the passage from *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* nor Norton's claim, provide any direct link to Radcliffe as Socinian, it should be considered, especially in assessing the radical theological nature of her work. In addition, Socinianism was, as Ruth Watts notes, considered both blasphemous and illegal until 1813 (Watts 4). If Radcliffe was a Socinian, this could account, based on laws against Anti-Trinitarians, for the subversive nature of much of her fiction.

[18] See John 20:1-10 (King James Bible)

[19] If Radcliffe was a Socinian, this would place her squarely in the Unitarian camp of Rational Dissent.

In addition to the failure to execute reason on the part of the guards and the Socinian strains of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, we also see an allegiance to some of the ideas of Natural Theology. As earlier noted, Osbert, the Earl of Athlin, "loved to wander the romantic scenes of the Highlands" (*AD* 5), and it is on one of those wanderings he meets the noble peasant, Alleyn. Alleyn hails from a part of the Highlands the narrator terms, "the most beautifully romantic spot that he [Osbert] had ever seen" (6). In contrast, we see a striking lack of natural beauty in the land surrounding Dunbayne, "they [the lands] are scarcely sufficient to support his wretched people, who, sinking under severe exactions, suffer to lie uncultivated, tracts which would otherwise add riches to their land" (7). The dichotomy between natural beauty and a failure to cultivate natural beauty serve to underscore the differences between Athlin and Dunbayne, Osbert and Malcolm. Robert J. Mayhew, although arguing for a latitudinarian Anglican reading of Radcliffe, is right to note Radcliffe's concern with, "the interconnection between the natural world and rational faith" (Mayhew 606). Similarly Mark Philp argues that Rational Dissenters had, "an obligation to act and speak with complete honesty in one's dealings with others" (Philp 37). When we take these ideas into consideration, we can read Malcolm's fallow lands and usurpation of the Baroness (and Alleyn's) lands as flying directly in the face of the ideals of rational religion. Conversely, Osbert's romantic vistas and willingness to act against Malcolm as adhering--somewhat clumsily-- to the tenets of rational religion. Also, the idea of natural and unnatural become codifiers of the differences between Catholic/Anglican supernatural mysticism and rational religion.

We should also consider the concrete physicality of the castles in this reading of

The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne. Alison Milbank, in her introduction to the novel, recognizes the importance of the natural surroundings of both Dunbayne and Athlin writing, "Dunbayne's natural sublimity similarly seeks to dominate the natural world and separate itself from it," whereas, "Athlin Castle and its social organization is one that reaches out to the created order and lives in awareness of its subjections to natural processes" (Milbank xxi). Again, we see Malcolm attempting to dominate and control nature as an attempt to create God in the image of man and Osbert's romantic vistas as a signal of a man more in touch with his rational nature and the rational nature of the Enlightenment Godhead.

Yet all of the aforementioned points would matter little in reading Radcliffe if not for the end of the novel. Radcliffe's narrator tells us:

> It is now seen, that those virtues which stimulated him [Alleyn] to prosecute for another the cause of justice mysteriously urged him to the recovery of his rights. Virtue may for a time be pursued by misfortune,--and justice be obscured by the transient triumphs of vice,--but the power whose peculiar attributes they are, clears away the clouds of error, and even in this world reveals his THRONE OF JUSTICE (*AD* 113, emphasis Radcliffe)

This passage is not as dramatic as Walpole's Alfonso the Good setting all things right but yet it does indicate a benign--if somewhat passive--providential force behind all the events of the novel, guiding them to a righteous and just conclusion. Alison Milbank has gone as far as to call this passage, "a metaphysical dawn," she goes on to write:

> By aligning themselves aesthetically with the sublime power of God in nature, and politically against the with the rejection of tyranny, Radcliffe's protagonists have enabled the operation of poetic justice, and the apocalyptic inroad of judgment as 'justice bares the arm of God' and causes him to act. (Milbank xxiv)

While Milbank's assessment of the closing of the novel is eschatological in nature

(perhaps an attempt to align Radcliffe with the millenarians), it is my contention that, although the novel may have some eschatological strains, its strains are based more in rational religion with, perhaps, a Socinian bent. While this is not meant to place Radcliffe in one specific camp of Rational Dissent or Unitarianism, these are important ideas to consider as they point to the idea that Radcliffe's religious (and thus political) leanings were radical by the time she began to write. This allows us to read some of the religious and political ideas in her later novels not as those of an emerging radical bluestocking, but as the progression of a writer who improves at her craft and becomes more successful at subverting these radical ideas.

Rational Ghosts

Though *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* does present some of the more radical theological ideas in Radcliffe's oeuvre, it ultimately fails in representing the kind of rational paradise so earnestly sought after by Rational Dissenters. *A Sicilian Romance* is a more nuanced novel, one that utilizes more explained supernatural and attempts to carve out a space for women to escape--to a degree--a patriarchal system bound and determined to suppress them. As earlier noted in this thesis, *A Sicilian Romance* places the education of Emilia and Julia, its heroines, at the forefront of the novel. Education, in addition to preparing the women for the world that awaits them, also proves to be at the heart of Radcliffe's explained supernatural in the novel.

The main supernatural theme of the novel is the idea that the south tower of the Castle Mazzini is inhabited by some sort of supernatural spirit. Madame de Menon is the first to see the light from the south tower and immediately suspects a thief; "She apprehended that some person had penetrated that part of the edifice with an intention to

plunder" (*SR* 8). The search yields nothing and Madame attempts to put the event behind her. However, Julia sees the light herself one evening while reading and hastens to Madame's apartment. Again, the alarm is raised but "No one could be found of courage sufficient to enter into the courts; and the orders of madame [sic] were disregarded, when opposed to the effects of superstitious terror" (9). Here again, we see education playing a role in the way events are interpreted; for those without education, the subalterns, the origin of the light in the south tower of the castle must be supernatural whereas to those who are educated, Madame de Menon and her charges, the cause cannot be supernatural. Radcliffe's narrator indicates as much in the following passages: "In the minds of the vulgar, any species of the wonderful if received with avidity; and the servants did not hesitate in believing the southern division of the castle to be inhabited by a supernatural power" (10), as opposed to "Madame de Menon, whose mind was superior to the effects of superstition, was yet disturbed and perplexed, and she determined, if the light reappeared , to inform the marquis of the circumstance" (*Ibid*). For Madame, and indeed any rational person, simply concluding the troubling light is the result of a supernatural spirit is not a viable option; the light must be investigated to determine its origin.

When the marquis arrives, his reaction to the stories of the light from the south tower resembles Madame's reaction somewhat but also differs markedly. In reaction to Madame's story, "He treated the affair very lightly, laughed at her conjectures, represented the appearances she described as the illusions of a weak and timid mind" (13), and to the servants he replies "'And who is he that has commissioned you with this story?' said the marquis, in a tone of displeasure; 'are the weak and ridiculous fancies of women and servants to be obtruded upon my notice?'" (13-14). Though the Marquis is

dismissive of the idea of a supernatural force occupying the south of the castle, his refusal to investigate codes him differently than Madame. Madame is simply attempting to reconcile that which she had seen with her own eyes with the truth of the situation, whereas the marquis is simply willing to dismiss it outright. Though we later learn that the marquis knows exactly what is in the south tower, at this early stage of the novel his failure to investigate this circumstance is not only a failure to determine a rational cause but also a failure to respect the female voice. His conflation of the female voice with those of the uneducated servants codes him as more of a tyrant than a rationalist. Further, the marquis' ideas concerning the rational capabilities of women are in direct contrast with the ideas of Rational Dissent, especially Unitarianism. Ruth Watts notes, "Their key beliefs enabled Unitarians to hold a much higher conception of womanhood than was generally prevalent" (Watts 77). Watts goes on to write, "They [Unitarians] did not accept that women were an inferior species of mankind" (78). The marquis's thoughts on women and his treatment of them--especially his first wife--place him as part of the old system, intent on viewing women as "an inferior species of mankind."

Though the marquis is quick to scoff at the subalterns' supernatural fears, he does employ the supernatural in an attempt to keep Ferdinand, his son, from the truth of the south tower. The marquis concocts a story concerning an old murder committed by his forbears to keep Ferdinand from the truth that his mother--who he and his sisters thought dead-- is imprisoned in the south tower of the Castle Mazzini. Here we see a striking departure from the Gothic supernatural. Walpole's ghost in *The Castle of Otranto* and Matthew Lewis' ghost in his Gothic drama *The Castle Spectre* (1797) are both used in such a way that they reveal truth whereas in Radcliffe the notion of supernatural powers

and occurrences is used to obscure and obfuscate the truth. For the marquis, belief in the supernatural becomes a simple way of keeping his family and his servants from the truth of his misdeeds and his polygamy. Unquestioning belief in the supernatural without empirical evidence and investigation then becomes a tool to keep individuals in ignorance and fear, hardly the type of thing Rational Dissenters would endorse.

If Radcliffean supernatural is defined by the idea of obscuring the truth, then the striking lack of realized supernatural occurrences in her fiction become coded as a desire to seek out, find, and reveal the truth. This desire to seek out truth in all its forms was a hallmark of Rational Dissent thought and theology. Mark Philp writes of Rational Dissenters, "Salvation was achieved through the pursuit of truth--or God's light--and by our subjection of the potentially rational will to this truth. Religious truths, like the truths of nature, were essentially communicable" (36). Although Julia, Emilia and Ferdinand's attempts to seek out the truth of the south tower are thwarted by flight and imprisonment, their attempt to discover the truth can still be read as an attempt to uncover whatever lies in the south tower. Additionally, their plan of action adheres to Madame de Menon's charge to "exercise your reason" (36). Most interestingly, Madame de Menon is not willing to rule out the possibility of something supernatural in the castle, she tells Julia and Emilia:

> 'My children,' said she, 'I will not attempt to persuade you that the existence of such spirits is impossible. Who shall say that any thing is impossible to God? We know that he has made us, who are embodied spirits; he, therefore, can make us unembodied [sic] spirits' (*SR* 36)

Madame's request of Julia and Emilia to keep an open mind and work towards a logical solution that can be verified empirically is in line with what we should expect from a Dissenting tradition that took its cues from Newtonian science.

Yet another, and perhaps more compelling, explanation for Radcliffe's lack of realized supernatural occurrences is the idea that the treatment of women is far more horrifying than any ghost. Towards the end of the novel, as Julia is being pursued by her father and the duke, she finds her way into a chamber that leads to the south of the castle. Much to her astonishment, she discovers her mother who has been imprisoned by her father. Her mother's response indicates the truth of the matter to Julia,

> 'Thank heaven!' said she, 'my prayer is granted. I am permitted to embrace one of my children before I die. Tell me what brought you hither. Has the marquis at last relented, and allowed me once again to behold you, or has his death dissolved my wretched bondage?' (*SR* 174)

Julia then begins to understand the cause of the light in the south tower and its reason. Her mother explains to her that the screams they heard were hers and that the light was that of the servant coming to feed her each night. Though, as earlier noted, many critics have argued Radcliffe's explained supernatural fulfills the reader's expectation of terror but cheats the reader out of her own definition of horror, this may not have been the case to the Rational Dissenting mind. True, there is no ghost, but what Julia discovers here is far worse than any ghost, it is the circumscribed state of women in society. A ghost can be appeased and/or exact its vengeance and the threat can be eliminated; however, for Radcliffe and virtually every other eighteenth-century woman, there is no way to appease the horror of their circumscribed nature. In a similar light, we can view what Julia experiences as she hears her mother's story as a sort Radcliffean horror because it is here that she encounters the truth about her position in the world and it proves far more horrifying than any supernatural ghost or specter out to wreak vengeance and set things right. The circumscribed nature of women--to the eighteenth-century female British mind--is an insurmountable obstacle and, in a sense, proves to be the sum of all fears.

Though there are no ghosts in *A Sicilian Romance*, there is still a guiding, providential force, the ending to the novel reveals as much:

> In reviewing this story, we perceive a singular and striking instance of moral retribution. We learn, also, that those who do only THAT WHICH IS RIGHT, endure nothing in misfortune but a trial of their virtue, and from trials well endured derive the surest claim to the protection of heaven. (*SR* 199, emphasis Radcliffe)

The idea that Julia, Emilia, Louisa, Madame de Menon and Hippolitus are able to escape to, albeit Catholic, Naples signals that some sort of providence was behind the curtain directing events. Also, the narrator's conclusion that they "derive the surest claim to the protection of heaven" indicate as much. Though they are unable to carve out the kind of space for themselves where all will be free, they are able to free themselves and establish their own micro-society that honors and respects women. This micro-society is, according to the narrator, ordained by divine providence and under "the protection of heaven."

A Rational Society

The Romance of the Forest, like the two novels that preceded it, involves explained supernatural occurrences and more terror than horror. However, unlike its predecessors in Radcliffe's oeuvre, there are some scenes of Gothic horror that are realized to some extent, yet almost immediately marginalized because they only occur in Adeline's dreams. Adeline's first brush with horror in her dreams comes when is imprisoned in a house in the French country side. Adeline describes this horrific dream as a "waking dream" and recounts the following:

> I was in a lonely forest with my father; his looks were severe, and his gestures menacing: he upbraided me for leaving the convent, and while he spoke, drew from his pocket a mirror, which he held before my face; I looked in it and saw, (my blood now thrills as I repeat it) I saw myself wounded, and bleeding profusely. (*RF* 41)

Later in the novel, Adeline has a series of three dreams, all of which involve the dead body of a chevalier, presumably Theodore, which culminate with Adeline witnessing "a stream of blood gushed from his side" (*RF* 109). Though these are only dreams, Adeline thinks to herself, "they were so very terrible, returned so often, and seemed to be so connected with each other, that she could scarcely think them accidental; yet, why they should be supernatural, she could not tell" (*RF* 110). The idea of the supernatural in her dreams at first seems confusing. Her dreams contain no ghosts of spirits but yet she has the nagging suspicion that they are, or could be, supernatural due to their recurrence and connected nature. The supernatural element here can be read as a kind of passive, indirect, intervention on the part of providence to warn her of the impending danger heading towards both herself and Theodore. When considered in relation to the plot of the novel, this seems to make sense as Adeline and Theodore both narrowly escape murder via the marquis. Yet this sort of intervention still differs from that of Walpole or Lewis, in that it does not attempt to prevent these events from happening, but only serves to make Adeline aware of impending danger.

Dreams, however, are not the only allegedly supernatural elements in the narrative. La Motte's servant, Peter, returns from the nearby village to report the widespread belief among the villagers that the abbey is haunted, "Among the rest, it was said that strange appearances had been observed at the abbey" (31). The narrator goes to inform us that, "though this report had been ridiculed by sensible persons as the idle superstitions of ignorance" (*Ibid*), but the peasants' belief in the supernatural occurrences in the abbey was so strong that none had ventured near it in seventeen years. Here again, we see peasants, part of the uneducated class, adhering to a supernatural belief while

those who are educated scoffing at the notion. However, La Motte is pleased by this report; like the marquis in *A Sicilian Romance*, he is only too happy to have the peasants believe in the supernatural as it serves as a means of keeping him secreted in the abbey. Thus, for Radcliffe, the supernatural again serves to obscure, rather than reveal, truth.

Though the manuscript Adeline finds revealing the abbey to be the scene of murder incites both terror and horror in her, her position as a reader betrays the actual dangers encroaching upon her. Similar to Austen's Catherine Morland, in her Gothic pseudo-spoof *Northanger Abbey*, Adeline is unable to detect the very real danger of the marquis' sexually predatory pursuit of her. Instead, letting the manuscript terrorize and horrify her thoughts and dreams. As readers, we must wait for Adeline to recognize her own vulnerable position--as both orphan and woman--and wait for her to "learn to support herself in a world of male aggression" (Haggerty 162). By the time Adeline is able to realize the *real* danger she is in, it is almost too late. Her attempts to secret herself in a tomb near the abbey are marked by the terror the ruin holds for her; Radcliffe's narrator tells us, "The power of imagination almost overcame her" (*RF* 154). Yet this attempt to escape the marquis ultimately fails when she is betrayed by Peter and is whisked away to the marquis' pleasure palace.

Again, the recognition of horror does not occur in the form of ghosts exacting vengeance but in the form of recognition of the state of women in society. The narrator tells us of Adeline after discovering the marquis' intention to marry her, "The moment she was alone, she yielded to the bursting anguish of her heart" (163); though this despair does not last long, she almost immediately attempts to escape and is aided in her task by Theodore, who has come to rescue her. However, the recognition she experiences in this

scene is far more horrifying than any tale of murder and betrayal because it directly involves herself. Here, she has moved from the position of a reader of the Gothic to the one who has recognized her own precarious place in society and the inherent dangers of such a place.

Though Adeline is rapaciously pursued by the marquis, she is rescued from him by both Theodore and Peter. Eventually, she finds herself in Leloncourt, the Protestant paradise of La Luc. Mark Canuel notes of Adeline's struggle to escape the marquis, "she discovers shelter finally in the tranquil company of the La Luc family, which is primarily characterized by its tolerance, its 'philanthropy' which is 'diffused through the whole village,' and by its active engagement in commercial enterprises" (Canuel 78). Chloe Chard and Judith Clark Schaneman are right to note the resemblance of La Luc to Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar and correctly note that La Luc's Protestantism removes the Catholic problem from both La Luc and the novel. However, the form of La Luc's Protestantism should be examined here to see precisely what it reveals, "His mind was penetrating, his views extensive; and his systems, like his religion, were simple, rational and sublime" (*RF* 245). The notion of La Luc's systems as "simple, rational and sublime" codes him as an enlightened man of the era, conversant with philosophy and science. Mark Philp writes, "For Rational Dissenters natural science and religious science, or pneumatology, were seen in terms of reason gradually uncovering God's rational will, either as expressed in nature or in the revelation of scripture" (Philp 37). Chloe Chard notes of the similarity between La Luc and Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar, "The *vicaire*, emphasizing the superiority of 'rational' belief over a religion based on revelation, and the superiority of 'simple' and 'sublime' tenets of the gospels over the elaborate,

ritualistic religion of the (Roman Catholic) Church" (Chard 386, emphasis Chard). La Luc's coding as an almost perfect rational man of the eighteenth-century and his willingness and ability to protect Adeline offers a hopeful alternative of the kind of society Rational Dissenters could establish if given the opportunity.

Any reading of La Luc should not overlook the aspects of Natural Theology indicated by his beliefs. The obvious binary opposition to La Luc is the Marquis de Montalt; the marquis, like Baron Malcolm of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, has attempted to control nature and make it in his image; the garden at the pleasure palace indicates as much. Adeline reflects upon the garden in her attempt to escape, "To her imagination the grounds were boundless; she had wandered from lawn to lawn, and from grove to grove, without perceiving any termination to the place" (*RF* 166). The garden appears to be of neoclassical design; hence its order and direction lead Adeline to walk in circles as she becomes disoriented by its design. In contrast to this are the sublime aspects of untamed and unordered (by man) nature glorified by La Luc, "'The view of these objects,' said La Luc, 'lift the soul to their Great Author, and we contemplate with a feeling almost too vast for humanity--the sublimity of his nature in the grandeur of his works'" (265). Also interesting to note here is Adeline's reactions to these different ideas of nature; the marquis' garden only serves to confuse and disorient her whereas the top of the mountain--unordered by man--leads to an almost reverent state, they, "surpassed all expression" (*Ibid*). The unordered aspects of nature, in contrast to the marquis' garden, inspire neither terror nor horror but allow Adeline to embrace the "Great Author" in a way that the cloister or the abbey--both places of Catholic prominence--never allowed her to. The feelings of safety and security created by La Luc and his Protestant Paradise

indicate a world as it should be--not as it is-- and serve to express a desire for religious reform from a revelatory Godhead to a rational one.

This desire for religious reform to a more rational godhead seems to be borne out in the end of the novel. After the marquis's death and Theodore's exoneration, Adeline and Theodore marry and spend their days in Leloncourt among a, "select and *enlightened* society" (362, emphasis mine). Martin Fitzpatrick notes of Rational Dissenters, "a properly enlightened community would be one in which *all* possessed full religious, civil, and political rights and which was capable of maintaining truth in all its forms" ("Heretical Religion…" 355, emphasis mine). Similarly, Mark Philp suggests of Rational Dissenters that their goal was to, "form a community of discussants aiming solely for the furtherance of God's truth" (Philp 37). The last lines of the novel also seem to confirm this idea of community of discussants, all of whom participate,

> Their former lives afforded an example of trials well endured--and their present, of virtues greatly rewarded; and this reward they continued to deserve--for not to themselves was their happiness contracted, but diffused to all who came within their sphere of influence. The indigent and unhappy rejoiced in their benevolence, the virtuous and enlightened in their friendship, and their children in parents whose example impressed upon their hearts the precepts offered to their understanding. (*RF* 363)

This community, however, should not be viewed as one that would impress its opinions and beliefs on others. Martin Fitzpatrick observes of Rational Dissent, "they were not anxious to exercise dominion over the consciences of others" (Fitzpatrick 341). Mark Canuel has noted the tolerant nature of La Luc's Leloncourt (Canuel 78) and tolerance indeed would have been an improved circumstance for many Rational Dissenters, especially Unitarians.

What emerges from Radcliffe's reappropriation of the Gothic supernatural is a

reading that must note her allegiance to Rational Dissent, Unitarianism and Natural Theology. This allegiance to what historians have called "rational religion" requires a notion of the godhead that is at once rational and providential but not necessarily interventionist. Further, the kind of society envisioned imperfectly at the end of *A Sicilian Romance* and more perfectly in *The Romance of the Forest* is a society that is enlightened, rational and tolerant. Because rational religion was so markedly different from traditional British notions of Christianity and because the Gothic genre was so indebted to the supernatural, we must take these theological factors into account when assessing Radcliffe's Gothic and the why and the how of its verisimilitude.

Conclusion

As earlier noted, Radcliffe has gained the reputation as that of a conservative writer in a time of great religious and social upheaval. My earnest hope is that this thesis has challenged some of those assumptions and argued for a more progressive reading of Radcliffe than scholars such as Robert J. Mayhew, Claudia Johnson and Robert Miles, among others, have argued for. However, questions still remain concerning the nature of Radcliffe's beliefs and work. While I have not attempted to place Radcliffe into any specific doctrine or dogma, I have attempted to shed light on how these leanings influenced her work and to challenge old assumptions concerning Radcliffe and the Gothic but perhaps a few more words on some of these issues will be helpful. Specifically, I would like to briefly discuss the marriage plot, the lack of ultimate legal female agency on the part of Radcliffe's women, and the limits of the Gothic genre in expressing these differing theological viewpoints.

In some ways, the marriage plot in Radcliffe's fiction seems to nullify the freedom that her female characters find through their adventures. One of the things that naturally arises out of the marriage plot is that that female character's identity becomes subsumed into her husband's, but that is not necessarily the case in Radcliffe. Over and over, we see her women choosing mates that cherish their wives as people, not as property. Alleyn's devotion to Mary, Hippolitus' love and support for Julia, and Theodore's passion for Adeline are all real and all based on the intrinsic value of each woman. Additionally, Baron Malcolm, the Marquis de Mazzini, and the Marquis de Montalt--all men who do not cherish the intrinsic value of women--are ultimately thwarted by the end of the novel and thwarted--as chapter three argues--in such a way as

to indicate the judgment of a providential force is against them. Further complicating the marriage plot in Radcliffe's fiction is the work of Judith Lowder-Newton who argues,

> [E]ntry into the world, of education, and of growth, including growth of power, the heroine's power is sometimes renounced and often diminished at the end of novel, so that it seems that the work has nothing to do with power at all. For no matter how much force the heroine is granted at the beginning of the story, ideology, as it governed life and as it governed literary form, required that she should marry, and marriage meant relinquishment power as it surely as it meant the purchase of wedding clothes. (Lowder Newton 8)

Lowder Newton's argument concerning the marriage plot can be applied to Radcliffe's work as it allows Radcliffe to propose radical ideas within her texts but then to allow those radical concepts to be subsumed by the marriage plot, thus seemingly negating the power of the heroine, but actually, given the choice of husbands for her heroines, allowing them to retain their power. In this way, Radcliffe allows for agency on the part of her women without upsetting the social order or proposing changes so radical that they would make it impossible for the publication of her work.[20]

[20] Though this thesis has revolved around Radcliffe's novels and theological leanings, there is still an unanswered question concerning these works and her theology. The question, simply put is this: Given the fact that there was a large Rational Dissenting press at the time and that other Dissenting women, especially Anna Letitia Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft, were not shy concerning their spiritual and theological viewpoints, why would Radcliffe keep her views private? This question is particularly difficult to answer due to the fact that the vast majority of Radcliffe's personal writings have disappeared. Also, Radcliffe's desire to maintain a private life (both *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* and *A Sicilian Romance* were published anonymously) leads to a dearth of contemporary information concerning her as well. However, I propose to think of Radcliffe's privacy as one borne out of economic concerns, not religious ones. Radcliffe's husband, William, was a journalist of some note but one who was not well-off financially. In fact, Rictor Norton's research indicates that her income from writing was considerably more than William's from journalism; Norton suggests that the Radcliffes depended more on her income than his (Norton 94-96). Radcliffe became so famous and was paid so well for her work that other women writers, such as Frances Burney, sought to structure their own novels in similar ways to Radcliffe, so they would be paid as much for their work as Radcliffe was for hers (Norton 96). If we think of her views in this way, it is easy to see why she wished her theology to remain an enigma in her work. As earlier noted, not all Rational Dissenting beliefs, especially Unitarian beliefs, were legal while Radcliffe was writing and were Radcliffe to express radical religious viewpoints in her work, the results, from an economic standpoint, could have been disastrous.

Though Radcliffe's narratives are clearly subversive in some of their elements, her women ultimately lack legal agency at the end of her novels, which contributes to the conservative understanding of Radcliffe and her oeuvre. However, it is difficult to imagine a text where Radcliffe could have granted her female characters legal authority given the legal status of women at the time. This lack of legal agency extended into Radcliffe's own professional life. In discussing Radcliffe's professional life, Rictor Norton writes concerning the contract for *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, "William and Ann [Radcliffe] both had to sign the contract, because married women had no legal status for agreements regarding property, intellectual or otherwise" (Norton 94). April London complicates this discourse surrounding female property by arguing,

> Women's embodiment of customary and more modern understandings of property derives from two sources: on the one hand, the extrinsic signification women carry in their legal status as the property of father and husband and, on the other, the intrinsic meaning they potentially exercise as possessors of their own persons (London 6).

In this way, we do see women, especially Julia and Adeline, and Madame de Menon and Mary to a lesser extent, exercising this second form of female property; they have and act with the agency of "possessors of their own persons" but lack the ultimate legal authority to hold property. This inability of married women to own property is what makes Malcolm's demand so horrifying in *Athlin and Dunbayne* and what makes Theodore such

a good match for Adeline in *The Romance of the Forest*. Read in this way, we can see Radcliffe attempting to negotiate the difficult legal terrain of women in the eighteenth century. Thus Malcolm becomes a cautionary tale and Theodore provides the best possible outcome but the fact remains that marriage can be dangerous to women in the eighteenth century, inside or outside of Radcliffe's fiction. The lack of legal agency exercised by Radcliffe's women is not a failure of progressive intonation on her part but a reflection of the actual status of women in the world she lived and wrote in.

The limits of the Gothic genre for an expression of Radcliffe's theological viewpoints proves to be a more difficult issue to tackle for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that in many ways, Radcliffe is one of the originators of the Gothic. Robert Miles, as earlier noted, points out that the basic female Gothic plot is also the ur-Radcliffe plot ("Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis" 43). Similarly, A.J. Clery argues "Radcliffe was the first woman writer to make 'Gothic' elements…the exclusive focus of her career" (Clery 50). Thus, assessing Radcliffe in the context of the Gothic genre is difficult because she was inventing many Gothic conventions as she wrote. That being said, we can still see that the Gothic genre proved a double-edged sword for subversive narratives such as Radcliffe's. On the one hand, its almost exclusively Continental setting allowed Radcliffe to mask her disdain for Anglicanism in a repudiation of Catholicism; on the other hand, its late medieval settings provided obstacles for articulating her own brand of Protestant dissent. Similarly, these late medieval settings allowed for a subversive discussion of the legal rights of women but they also made it more difficult to argue for the type(s) and kind(s) of education that the late eighteenth-century was beginning to afford women. Finally, the late medieval settings of Gothic novels allow

Radcliffe to use supernatural elements in her fiction, but those same settings limit her in expressing Protestant beliefs about the nature of the Godhead.

What emerges from this reading of Radcliffe is not the portrait of a conservative woman of the eighteenth-century or that of a Rational Dissenter keeping her progressive theological viewpoint to herself, but the portrait of a progressive Rational Dissenter attempting to articulate her own vision for her world. However, in articulating this vision it would have been essential for Radcliffe to make clear that her vision would not upset the social order. Thus, her use of the marriage plot, her ultimate acknowledgement of the legal status of women and her use of the Gothic genre, even though the genre allowed some viewpoints while simultaneously denying others. Even though this reading has not included all of Radcliffe's oeuvre, it has provided a new way of thinking about Radcliffe. Yet this new way of considering Radcliffe asks as many questions as it attempts to answer indicating that there is yet further work to be done on Radcliffe. My hope is that this further work will continue in an effort to move Radcliffe studies in a direction that focuses on her theology and the more progressive elements of her fiction.

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